SCIENCE OF THE SAINTS

R. J. MEYER, S. J.

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1919

The Science of the Saints

BY

R. J. MEYER, S. J.

VOLUME I

MAN SUCH AS HE IS

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FIFTH EDITION

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ST. LOUIS, MO., 1914
Published by B. HERDER
17 South Broadway

FREIBURG (BADEN)
Germany

LONDON, W. C.
68 Great Russell Str.

NIHIL OBSTAT.

JOSEPH GRIMMELSMAN, S. J.,
Praep. Prov. Missour.

Die 26. Dec. 1901.

NIHIL OBSTAT.

S. Ludovici, die 9. Januarii 1902.

F. G. HOLWECK,
Censor Theologicus.

IMPRIMATUR.

St. Louis, Mo., January 10th, 1902.

✠ JOHN J. KAIN,
Archbishop of St. Louis.

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PRINTING AND BOOK MFG. CO.
ST. LOUIS, MO.

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PREFACE.

The following pages form the first part of a little work whose purpose, as sketched in the Introduction, is expressed by the general title, "First Lessons in the Science of the Saints."

The subjects which are treated in the present volume, as well as those which, God willing and necessary occupations permitting, are to be treated in subsequent volumes, have often furnished appropriate matter for spiritual conferences, instructions and considerations during the Annual Retreats, made by priests, religious, seminarians, sodalists and others who desired to lay a solid foundation of Christian virtue. They have, therefore, as is natural, a special connection with the Exercises of the Retreat; but the principles, embodied in them, bear upon all the actions of our lives.

In the development of these subjects — while endeavoring to preserve the simplicity of oral instruction, and frequently presenting the same thoughts under different aspects and in different language — it has seemed best to dispense with many practical applications and illustrations, which, however profitable to particular classes of persons, are not equally

adapted to the general public. What is lost by this omission, in point of personal interest, directness and unction, will be gained, it is hoped, in point of usefulness to a larger number of souls.

On the other hand — in the text of the work, and especially in the foot-notes — references to Catholic theologians and other standard authors, as also quotations from their writings, are more frequent than is perhaps customary in spoken discourses, or even in printed books, on ascetical matters. The motive which seemed to recommend or, at least, to justify such a departure, is twofold. In the first place, by going back to the fountain-head, those who wish to make a profounder study of the Science of the Saints, will be able to do so with less fear of error. In the second place, they will be able to see at a glance, how far these "First Lessons" reflect the mind of Holy Mother Church, to whose infallible judgment everything contained in them is most humbly and unreservedly submitted.

May the devout reader be led, by their perusal, to a more intelligent esteem of the interior life, and to a more ardent love of God; and, in his supplications to the throne of grace, may he sometimes remember

THE AUTHOR.

ROME,
Feast of St. Ignatius,
July 31st, 1901.

INTRODUCTION.

The Science of the Saints teaches us, how man, such as he is, must rise above the world in which he lives, towards God for whom he was created.

The Holy Ghost exhorts us to apply ourselves to the pursuit of wisdom. "Study wisdom, my son," He says, "and make my heart joyful."[1] The Church gives us the same advice, when she bids us pray for help to advance in the Science of the Saints.[2] For the Science of the Saints is only another name for that heavenly wisdom, recommended to the children of God.

It is the most exalted of sciences, because it is based upon the sublimest principles of supernatural revelation; it is the most necessary of sciences, because it is the science of salvation; it is, in fine, the science of sciences, because all other sciences must, in some manner, be subordinated to it. Whoever knows it perfectly, though ignorant of everything else, is truly wise in the sight of God. Hence it formed, from the beginning of the world, the chief study of the elect; but never before was it so clearly proposed, nor so strongly inculcated, as it is in the school of Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom.

[1] Prov. XXVII. 11.
[2] Prayer, Feast of St. John Cantius.

In its broadest acceptation, it covers the whole field of Ascetic and Mystic Theology. It treats alike of God's ordinary providence over all his children in general, and of his mysterious dealings with certain chosen souls in particular. It directs as well the first faltering steps of the beginner, as the boldest flights of the perfect. It is adapted to every age and every capacity; or, rather, every age and every capacity is adapted to it. And the reason is, that the principal teacher of this divine science is the Holy Ghost Himself, who "giveth understanding to little ones."[1] He needs not wait for the slow development of years; because He can, and often does, supply in an instant for a long life of study and application. He has, however, at all times associated with Himself wise and holy men, especially enlightened by Him for the guidance of others; and these have composed a great variety of learned and pious works, destined to serve forever as text-books in the school of Christ.

The present little work does not pretend to rival them, much less to replace them. On the contrary, it aims, with the blessing of heaven, to introduce the devout reader to those abler and profounder treatises. Like a science primer, it seeks, by means of a few easy lessons, to create a taste for further study; or, if the expression may be permitted, it endeavors to translate into the every day language of the people, and to

[1] Psalm CXVIII. 130.

apply to the present time the principles of spirituality, which ought to be familiar to all that aspire to a life worthy of a Christian.

These principles, few and simple as the elementary substances which go to make up the vegetable kingdom, nevertheless give rise, in their practical application, to a spiritual world, as varied and complex as the material world of woodland and grove, of field and meadow, of tree and shrub, of herb and flower, around us.

This practical application of principles is of the utmost importance, because the Science of the Saints is essentially a practical science. The very word *asceticism*, meaning the study of spirituality, signifies literally *practice* or *exercise*. Consequently an *ascetic* is one who practises or exercises himself in the principles of spirituality; in other words, one who leads a spiritual life. In brief, the Science of the Saints consists not in empty speculation but in practice, not in bare knowledge but in action. To borrow the words of the pious author of the IMITATION OF CHRIST: "On the judgment-day we shall not be asked . . . . . how learnedly we have spoken, but how religiously we have lived."[1] In the same sense, our Saviour declares: "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in

[1] Book I. c. 3. n. 5.

heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."[1] And St. Paul writes: "Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."[2]

It is, nevertheless, true that action presupposes knowledge, and follows it. "May I know Thee, O my God, may I know myself," is St. Augustin's prayer; "may I know Thee, in order to love Thee; may I know myself, in order to despise myself." St. Ignatius expresses a similar thought, or rather he supplements St. Augustin's thought, when he directs us to pray, that we may know ourselves and the world: ourselves, in order to amend what is amiss in us; and the world, in order to escape from its seductions.[3] Knowledge of self, of the world and of God: this is the foundation of the Science of the Saints.

This truth is beautifully illustrated by a well-known passage of Holy Writ. It records that the patriarch Jacob, fleeing from the wrath of his brother Esau, laid himself down, after a day's fatiguing journey, to rest for the night upon the open fields of Bethel. "And he saw in his sleep a ladder standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven; the angels also of God ascending and descending by it, and the Lord leaning upon the ladder."[4]

[1] Matth. VII. 21.
[2] Rom. II. 13.
[3] Colloquy after Third Exercise of the First Week.
[4] Gen. XXVIII. 10 et seqq.

What can be the meaning of this mysterious vision? Surely, the blessed spirits need no physical support to rest upon; they move about, as they list and where they list, with the rapidity of the lightning. Why then are they mounted upon a ladder, scaling, as by slow degrees, from earth to heaven? One reason, among many which will occur to the mind, is that they symbolize man whose nature, since the first fall, rises with difficulty above the world in which he lives, towards God for whom he was made. We have not wings to soar, but we have feet to climb; we may, if we will, as St. Augustin expresses himself, make a ladder of our very vices, by trampling them under foot;[1] we may, in the words of a profane bard, rise on the stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things.

Man, the world, God: these must be the subjects of humble, prayerful study, if we desire to make any progress in the Science of the Saints, if we desire to acquire that heavenly wisdom which, on the authority of the Holy Ghost, "is better than all the most precious things."[2]

Man has not by nature the subtility and agility of the angels. These qualities are reserved for the day of his resurrection, when the body shall share, in its own way, in the privileges of the glorified soul; when,

[1] Sermo III. De Ascensione.

[2] Prov. VIII. 11; Job XXVIII. 12. et seqq.; Wisd. VII. 7.

after having been "sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body."[1] In his present state of existence, man is subject to the ordinary laws of matter, and, however heavenly his aspirations, he is constantly reminded of his earthly origin. The ardent spirit would fain take flight and soar aloft. But "the corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind."[2]

Nor is this all. For, in addition to our bodies, we have to carry the heavy burden of personal and inherited sin, of faults and imperfections, of passions and evil inclinations. Thus weighed down and worn, we have to toil and plod and strain, heavily, wearily, slowly up the ladder, we know not how long. What we do know is, that we are very far from the top, and that we must go on climbing higher, and still higher, as life advances.

To increase the difficulty yet more, there is the attraction of the world below. And at times how strong it seems to be! How all but irresistible! It is then, that we realize the full force of our Saviour's words: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."[3] It is then, that we understand the import of St. Gregory's sententious saying: "On earth the flesh is at home; when it is taken by our Lord into heaven, it

[1] I Cor. XV. 44.
[2] Wisd. IX. 15.
[3] Matth. XXVI. 41.

is, so to speak, carried off to a strange place."[1] Yes, of a truth, on earth the flesh is at home. There is its centre of attraction, to which it returns as naturally as a stone that has been thrown up into the air. We all feel it, and shall continue to feel it, "until our change shall come."[2]

But let us not, on that account, allow our hearts to sink and lose hope. The ladder which reaches from earth to heaven, is held fast at the top by the Almighty Himself. He is leaning over it, and beckoning us to come to Him. Why do we hesitate? What do we fear? If we grow dizzy at the sight of the sublime heights to which He invites us to ascend, He will stretch forth his hands to take hold of us, and will chide us in language as reassuring, as that which He addressed of old to his frightened Apostle, on the waters of Galilee: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"[3] Let us, then, bound towards Him, with all the impetuosity of ardent love, and never rest until He has folded us securely in his arms. Once we have left behind us the dull and heavy atmosphere of this lower world, and begun to inhale the purer and lighter air above, our whole being will thrill with unwonted life and vigor, such as the Royal Psalmist experienced, when he said to the Lord: "I

[1] Hom. 9. in Evang.
[2] Job XIV. 14.
[3] Matth. XIV. 31.

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ran the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart."[1]

We must not, therefore, set any narrow limits to our longings, writes the ecstatic St. Teresa, but firmly believe that, with God's holy grace, we shall be able to follow in the footsteps of the Saints. We must not have any misgivings, even when we discover that, at first, our success falls short of our expectations. The courageous efforts of a generous soul suffice, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, to raise it, in a short time, to a surprising height of holiness.[2]

Upward then, and onward, without ceasing, until we have gained the top of the ladder! To all of us it was said: "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."[3] If the animal body tends naturally towards the earth, the spiritual soul tends no less naturally towards heaven. It is destined for God; and it will not be happy until it reposes sweetly upon his divine bosom. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord," exclaims St. Augustin, "and our hearts will never be at rest, until they rest in Thee."

To sum up:—The subject-matter of heavenly Wisdom, or of the Science of the Saints, may be expressed in this one sentence: How *man*, such as he is, must rise above the *world* in which he lives, towards *God* for whom he was created.

[1] Psalm CXVIII. 32.
[2] Autobiogr. vol. I. c. 13.
[3] Matth. V. 48.

PART FIRST.

MAN SUCH AS HE IS.

LESSON I.

Self-knowledge — The foundation of all true knowledge.

"Know thyself!" [1]—This was the first lesson given by some ancient philosophers to every new disciple, who presented himself for instruction. In their opinion, self-knowledge was the foundation of all true knowledge; a compendious form of universal knowledge; the only knowledge worth acquiring; in fact, wisdom in a nutshell.

"Look for nothing outside of thyself," [2] said others, pursuing the same train of thought. Look for nothing outside of thyself! For within thyself thou wilt find matter for a life-long study. Every man is a little world in himself. [3] In his own person there is a miniature of the great world without, of which he is the climax and the complement. Or, to borrow the words of St. Gregory, "Man has something in common with every other creature. He has being in common with stones, life in common with trees,

[1] This maxim, also called a Delphic oracle and mentioned by Plato in his "Dialogues," is one among several, attributed to Pythagoras, and accepted by the school of philosophers known, after him, as Pythagoreans.

[2] "Nil te quaesieris extra."

[3] Aristotle (VIII Physicor. c. II) calls man the *microcosmos* or little world.

feeling in common with animals, intellect in common with angels. But, if he has something in common with every creature, it follows that, in a certain sense, he is every creature."[1] Hence, when he studies himself as he ought, he is really studying the whole creation.

On the other hand, unless he studies himself, he cannot properly study any other creature. For all other visible creatures must be referred to him, as to their immediate end.[2] They were made for him, and they derive their moral value and significance from their relation to him. Alone in this material universe, he is a free agent, capable of guiding and directing everything to its last end — God who made all that is, and to whom all must return. Do away with man, and everything here below will seem to be without meaning or purpose. How true, then, are the words of the IMITATION: "Better, certainly, is the humble husbandman who serves God, than the proud philosopher who, neglecting himself, considers the course of the heavens . . . . . The profoundest science and the most profitable lesson is truly to know and despise oneself."[3]

Yet many now-a-days resemble that proud philosopher, far more than they resemble that humble

[1] Hom. 29. in Evang.

[2] "Spiritual Exercises" of St. Ignatius — The Foundation.

[3] B. I, c. 12. nn. 1, 4.

husbandman. They all seek for knowledge; and in this they do well; they are but obeying a God-given impulse of their being. "Nature hath given to mortals an inquisitive turn of mind," said a pagan sage. "As birds were made to fly, fishes to swim and horses to run, so men were made to know." They all burn with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. But often, alas! their thirst is too feverish and capricious, to be natural — a sign of disease and not of health. And, what is worse, they try to satisfy it with objects, which only excite it the more. They observe the physical phenomena of the universe. But what about the spiritual phenomena of their own souls? They explore the mysteries of nature. But what about the mysteries of their own hearts? They study the laws of matter. But what about the laws which bind their own consciences? They forecast and map out the track of the coming storm. But what about the storms which rage in their own bosoms? They treat, like Solomon, of "trees from the cedar that is in Libanus, unto the hyssop that cometh out of the wall;" they discourse, like him, "of beasts and of fowls and of creeping things and of fishes."[1] But what about their own inner selves? About that they neither know, nor care to know, much. They talk a great deal, it is true, of self-knowledge; they recommend teaching it even to children in primary schools. But they mean

[1] III Kings, IV. 33.

a knowledge of the body and its functions, with due regard to hygiene or the laws of health; or, at best, a vague and general knowledge of character, so far as physiology can disclose it to us.

They are quick to see, to hear, to observe external objects. Their bodily senses are abnormally keen and active, too keen and active to allow of introspection and reflection. They are forever making excursions abroad, forever roaming at random over limitless fields of knowledge. Like professional tourists who are never happy, except when travelling in foreign parts, they gradually become perfect strangers to their own homes. They rarely enter the interior of their souls; and, when they do enter it, they take only a hasty glance at it, like the man of whom the Apostle writes, that he looks at his face in a glass, and presently forgets what manner of man he is.[1]

Some sovereigns are proverbially ignorant of the true condition of their own realms. They are too busy with interesting trifles, to look after the duller affairs of state. They may reign, but they certainly do not rule. They are plainly incapable of ruling, because they have neither the knowledge nor the leisure, required for that difficult art. The inevitable consequence is, that others rule both them and their estates. Very many persons are not less ignorant of

[1] James, I. 23, 24.

the true condition of their own interior, and the consequence is not less deplorable. Yet, as a rule, they fancy that they understand themselves thoroughly. So common is self-delusion in spiritual matters!

There are monomaniacs, whose delusion consists in a fixed belief that they are kings or queens, and who affect all the pomp and circumstance of their fictitious dignity. We pity them and, perhaps, consign them to a place of safety, in which they may play to their hearts' content at king and queen, and don the gaudy trappings of their fantastic royalty. Meanwhile there are thousands and thousands abroad, whose opinions concerning themselves are equally delusive, and incomparably more fatal in their effects. They live in a sort of fools' paradise. They see everything through a false medium, and therefore see nothing as it really is. Like the Pharisees of old, they exaggerate both their own good qualities and the shortcomings of the poor publicans, with whom they contrast themselves. They see a thousand things to admire in themselves, and a thousand things to censure in their neighbor; and, in their self-righteousness, they thank heaven that they are not like the rest of men. Blind to their own weaknesses, and unaware of the vicious propensities of their hearts, they consider themselves proof against all assaults, and say, in the language of Holy Writ, "We shall never be moved."[1] Full of self-confidence, they rush reck-

[1] Psalm XXIX. 7.

lessly into the midst of danger, and, as a merited chastisement of their folly, often fall into the very sins which they have condemned most severely in others.

O for a little self-knowledge! It would teach them humility and prudence, meekness and forbearance! It would show them, that there is no vice of which we have not the germs within us; and that therefore, as St. Augustin warns us, there is no sin committed by others, which may not be committed by us, unless, diffident of self and shunning the occasion, we rely upon the grace of God alone. "To make nothing of oneself," writes the pious author of the IMITATION, "and always to think well and commendably of others, is great wisdom and high perfection. If thou shouldst see another openly sin or commit a heinous crime, yet thou oughtest not to esteem thyself better, because thou knowest not how long thou mayest remain in a good state. We are all frail; but thou shouldst consider no one more frail than thyself."[1]

Self-knowledge, then, is necessary for all. But it is doubly necessary for such as have to guide and form the consciences of others. To discharge that delicate and responsible office with profit, they must possess a practical knowledge of human nature and of its action under the influence of grace. How are they to acquire that knowledge? "By personal experience," answer some, "by close observation and acquaintance with

[1] B. I. c. 2. n. 4.

the world." And thence they infer, that the devout, those who are specially consecrated to God or who flee from intercourse with the world, are unfitted to direct souls or to prepare the young for the duties of modern life.

But what is the precise nature of the experience here recommended? Is it actual contact with sin? Is it familiarity with every form and variety of crime? Is it frequenting the purlieus of vice, to observe how it slays its victims by the thousands? Is it balancing on the dizzy edge of the precipice, to test how easy it is to fall over it? Numbers of persons have unhappily had that sad experience, and even a still sadder experience. Have they benefited by it? Are they fitted to guide others? Alas! before being safe guides for others, they themselves have great need of being guided. As a rule, they must begin by unlearning many things which they have learned amiss. Their principles are false and their judgments distorted. They must undergo a complete transformation, and be changed into other men. The process is slow and tedious, and often only partially successful.

It was not in this wise, that St. Basil and St. Gregory fitted themselves to become teachers of men. As youths, they knew no roads but those which led to church and school. Later they withdrew into solitude, to commune in the presence of God with their own souls. Thence they came forth in due time, accomplished and experienced masters of the spiritual life.

It is always thus. Only the man who makes a profound study of his own interior, only the devout and spiritual man who labors to model his life according to the principles of Christian perfection, is fully qualified to be a director of consciences; because only such a man has the personal experience which is needed to preserve him from dangerous practical mistakes. If, in addition, he possesses a knowledge of the world at large, it is well; he can turn it to profit, as no one else can. For to him that knowledge is not simply a matter of history or erudition, but a confirmation of his own subjective experience, a counterpart of what has been going on in his own inner consciousness. He is in sympathy with all humanity outside of him; he feels his heart go out, in response to the hearts of all that seek his counsel and direction; he is kith and kin to all the world. He can say, in the fullest and best sense of the words, "I am a man, and nothing that touches man is foreign to my sympathies."[1] He enjoys the confidence of those who approach him, because he understands them. A word, a hint, a look, a movement, a sigh is enough to reveal to him the state of their souls. He seems to read their profoundest secrets, and to divine their most carefully suppressed inclinations. He has the key to their interior, and he knows how to use it. He understands others, because he understands himself.

[1] "Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto."

He is master of their hearts, because he is master of his own.

Nor is this true only of confessors and spiritual directors, but also, in due proportion, of parents and guardians, of teachers and tutors. If they wish to acquire a correct knowledge of those entrusted to their care, let them begin by studying themselves. If they wish to train those young hearts to habits of self-control, let them observe the effect of self-discipline upon themselves. It is the safest rule that they can follow, and worth incomparably more than all the boasted child-study and educational methods of modern pedagogy. It is a practical application, in the spiritual order, of the wise old saying, "From one specimen judge of all the rest." [1]

[1] "Ab uno disce omnes."

LESSON II.

Human Nature—A difficult problem solved by Divine Revelation.

To know ourselves, we must, before all else, know the human nature which is in us. Hence the pagan sages wisely made it an object of special study, and asked themselves, "what is man?"

Guided by the light of reason alone, they answered quite correctly: "Man is an animal endowed with reason, a compound of a material body and a spiritual soul." But the more they studied the subject, the more perplexed they became. For man, as he appeared to them, is a puzzle; a living antagonism; a bundle of contradictions, of lofty aspirations and groveling instincts; a plaything of the passions, perpetually tossed to and fro between heaven and earth.

How godlike the intellect of man! He soars on the wings of thought, beyond the bounds of time and space, to the throne of the Eternal and Infinite. He reads in the book of nature, spread out before him, the handwriting of Divine Wisdom, and from the contemplation of the creature acquires a knowledge of the Creator. He investigates the essences of

things, the cause of their being, the motive and purpose of their existence. He studies the physical forces of the universe, and makes them obedient to his will. And yet how profound is his ignorance of what concerns him most! How dense the darkness which encompasses him, when abandoned to himself! His knowledge is as the lightning-flash, which darts across the clouds and then vanishes, leaving his bewildered reason to lose itself in a midnight of doubt and error.

How noble the will of man! Master of his actions, he is, in a true sense, the arbiter of his own destiny. Prison bars may confine his limbs, but they cannot coerce his soul. Even upon the scaffold he may defy all human power; and, while he falls beneath the executioner's axe, he may be a freeman still. But, on the other hand, how weak, how irresolute is that sovereign will! A passing temptation, an unguarded look, a slight imprudence are often the occasions of the most lamentable falls. Like Samson shorn of his locks, the will seems to have lost its power for good. It abuses its very prerogative of freedom unto its own ruin. To-day it makes the firmest resolutions; to-morrow it breaks them. To-day it swears eternal allegiance to God; to-morrow it deserts to his enemies.

How wonderful the body of man! Alone among living beings, he walks with head erect, and gaze turned heavenward. How exquisite in form and

bearing! What a master-piece of divine workmanship! Traces of his Creator's fingers are in every line of his countenance. Yet, under another aspect, how vile that body! In infancy, how helpless! In age, how dependent! In death, how loathsome! In youth, how often a positive hindrance to the nobler aspirations of the spirit, a leaden weight which drags it down to what is lowest! It is precisely when the body is most vigorous, when the flush of health is on the cheek, when the blood courses lustily through the veins and every fibre tingles with life, that the spiritual man is wont to feel, like the Apostle of the Gentiles, that he is carrying about with him a "body of death."

Those who did not enjoy the full benefit of divine revelation, sought to account in various ways for this unhappy condition. Some admitted the existence, in the same person, of a dual soul; or else of a soul and a body, proceeding from a dual first principle, partly good and partly evil. Others held that human souls are spirits, confined in their bodies in expiation of sins, committed in a previous state of existence. A few, as if enlightened from above, surmised that man's primitive state was not a state of conflict, like the present; that he must have fallen from a higher state,[1] for which even now he longs, but to which he

[1] This conclusion, unless supported by revelation, gave them only probability, and not absolute certainty, as to the fall of man. The common belief in the fall of man, among the pagan nations of antiquity, may be accounted for in

strives in vain to return, without the special aid of God.

What some pagans surmised, all Christians know for a certainty. They have it on the infallible authority of Holy Writ, that human nature was not always what it is now; that, when it first came from the hands of its Maker, it was endowed with many rare privileges, which were destined to be hereditary and perpetual.

"In paradise," writes St. Augustin, "man lived as he wished, so long as he wished what God had commanded. He lived in the enjoyment of God, by whose goodness he was good. Without want of any kind, he had it in his power to live thus forever. There was food at hand, that he might not hunger; drink, that he might not thirst; the tree of life, that he might not waste away with years . . . . No disease from within, no danger from without; perfect health of body, and complete tranquillity of mind. As in paradise there was no heat or cold, so in its occupant there arose no desire or fear, at variance with his good will."[1] In other words, man's primitive state was a state of unalloyed happiness, because it was a state of unalterable peace: peace with his Creator, peace with the lower creation, peace with himself.

various ways, especially by the preservation among them of the primeval revelation or tradition, and by their intercourse with the Jews, or the spread of Jewish literature.—See Maas, "Christ in Type and Prophecy." Vol. I. page 75.

[1] De Civ. Dei, B. XIV. c. 26.

His relations towards his Creator were those of a child towards its father. Together with the natural life of the body, the Almighty had breathed into him, from the beginning, the supernatural life of sanctifying grace, and, elevating him above the condition of the creature, had made him, in a mysterious way, partaker of the divine nature.

Enjoying the special friendship and familiarity of his Creator, he was, as a consequence, at peace with the lower creation. So long as he remained worthy of that friendship and familiarity, he was the lawful lord and sovereign of the earth. He ruled his realm in peace, because all creatures recognized his authority and did his bidding. He called; and they said, "lo! here we are."

Finally, he was at peace with himself, because every part of his complex nature was in perfect harmony with every other part. His body, exempt from suffering and death, was the faithful companion, the submissive servant, the ready instrument of his soul. His senses were the windows through which he looked out upon the world, to behold, as in a mirror, the author of all that is. His animal feelings served and seconded his spiritual yearnings.

His whole being resembled a choir of trained singers, all entering fully into the spirit of the composition placed before them, and so rendering it that, while they throw their whole souls into their

respective parts, their well-modulated voices blend in perfect harmony, and produce a sweet concert of musical sounds, which lift the thoughts and feelings of the listener above the strife and discord of earth, into the peace and concord of heaven. This happy state of primitive innocence is expressed in the words of Ecclesiastes, "Only this have I found, that God made man right."[1] It was the result of the gift of integrity: a gratuitous gift, because wholly undue to human nature; a gift, nevertheless, which was destined, like sanctifying grace, to descend by way of inheritance to Adam's posterity, on the sole condition of his obedience to his Maker.

Adam rebelled, and by his own free act, as the moral head and representative of the human race, forfeited the title to heavenly nobility, the supernatural sonship of God, conferred upon him and his family by sanctifying grace. All his descendants, as children of a father degraded from his unmerited dignity, share his fate and are therefore, in a true sense, children of wrath. Thus all men came to contract original sin: a sin very different, in some respects, from personal sin, but none the less a real sin, because it consists in the privation of sanctifying grace, and, in the present order of providence, this privation constitutes man in the state of sin.

Together with the supernatural sonship of God,

[1] VII. 30.

Adam lost the special privileges attached to it. No sooner had he revolted against his Maker, than the lower creation, in its turn, revolted against him. Instead of lord and sovereign, he is now, as St. Ignatius expresses himself, "an exile amid the brute creation."[1] The earth is cursed in his work. Left to itself, it brings forth thorns and thistles: and, before it yields him even a scanty harvest, he has to till it "in the sweat of his brow."[2] The wild beasts of the field, prowling about for food, prey upon him, as if he were one of themselves. All the elements are up in arms against him. The sun scorches, the moon blights, the air is full of contagion; storms rage, lightnings strike, volcanoes vomit forth their red-hot lava; fires burn and reduce to ashes, floods lay waste and destroy the works of his hands.

All this disturbance of physical nature is a picture of the disturbance of man's moral nature, "wounded" or vitiated by the first fall.[3] "Nature itself which was . . . . created good and right, now stands for the defects and weaknesses of corrupt nature, because abandoned to itself nature is always prone to what is evil and imperfect. The little strength which now

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," Prelude of the First Exercise, First Week.

[2] Gen. III. 17, 18, 19.

[3] "Spoliatus gratuitis, vulneratus in naturalibus," is a common theological axiom, to express man's condition, in consequence of Adam's fall.

remains within us, is like a spark hidden in a heap of ashes."[1] Hence it happens that, according to the inward man, we are delighted with the law of God, but, according to the flesh, we obey the law of sin. There is a law in our members, fighting against the law of our mind, and making us captives in the law of sin, which is in our members. The good which we will, we do not; but the evil which we will not, that we do.[2] Such is the forcible language, in which St. Paul describes the inborn propensity to evil, which all of us experience. It is the effect of original sin, a part of the common heritage left us by our first parents. It is, however, much stronger in some than in others. There are those of whom it has been said, that they are "doubly born in sin;" because their nature is vitiated, not merely through inheritance from Adam, but also through inheritance from more immediate ancestors.

In the eye of the civil law of some countries, felony attaints and corrupts the blood of the offender's children. As a matter of fact, many sorts of crime, at least if they are habitual, may attaint and corrupt the blood of the sinner's children. For vice or a predisposition to it, like disease or a predisposition to it, is not unfrequently transmitted from parent to child;[3]

[1] Imitation, B. III. c. 55, n. 2.

[2] Rom. VII.

[3] There can be no doubt, that some diseases are hereditary in the strictest sense of the word. There are others,

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and, what is more, it is seemingly transmitted to one child and not to another, according as the parent is addicted to sinful indulgences, or free from them, at certain periods of life. How fearful, then, the responsibility of the parent, enslaved to vice! How pitiable the lot of the child, "doubly born in sin!"

Again human nature is, so to speak, tainted in the bud, by dangerous environment or faulty education in infancy and early childhood. The germs of vice, if they do not already exist in the child's bosom, are deposited there and fostered, sometimes intentionally, by those whose sacred duty it is to destroy them, or

however, formerly considered hereditary, which are no longer considered so. But, even in this case, physicians appear most commonly to admit at least an inherited predisposition to such diseases. Neither can there be any doubt, that some vices (or the predisposition to them) are inherited. One who has a special right to speak on the subject, thus expresses himself: "The materialistic school went so far as to teach, that there is a *criminal type* . . . . with the view of destroying the spirituality of the soul . . . . The ancient spiritualistic (Christian) school . . . . admits *the transmission of hereditary tendencies to crime;* but it also admits — because proved by experience and facts — the *corrigibility of inborn tendencies to evil.*"

(Bartolo Longo, Director of the "Ospizio dei figli dei Carcerati," Valle di Pompei, in his periodical for the months of January — May, 1897, where he gives the most startling examples, that came under his own observation, in proof of the double thesis sustained by the Christian school.)

The same thesis was ably sustained by two Christian experts, the Rev. Maurice de Baets, Prof. Lov., and his brother, Dr. G. de Baets, before the "Fourth International Congress of Criminal Anthropology," held in Geneva in 1896.

at least to check their development. There is no question now of those unnatural parents, who teach their children to lisp curses and blasphemies, saturate them with intoxicating drink, or incite them, long before the dawn of reason, to the most revolting vices. For such cases, however numerous, are anomalies, even in the state of fallen nature.[1]

But what shall we say of the Catholic mother, who smiles at her little daughter's frequent fits of pettishness, naughtiness, pertness? What of the Catholic father, who encourages his little son's repeated acts of impertinence, insubordination, vindictiveness? There are parents, who seem pleased to see their children show such signs of youthful passion, just as they are pleased to see a horse arch its neck, toss its mane, or career wildly over the meadow. They sometimes go further still, and applaud such childish sallies, as evidences of spirit and character. Evidences of spirit and character, indeed! They are the first manifesta-

[1] "Though endowed with its own nature and *congenital disposition*, the heart of the child is fitted to receive impressions from without . . . . . When the child grows up, the negligence and carelessness of educators, forgetful of their duty, allow the germs of evil to develop, if indeed — a still graver hypothesis — new seeds of evil be not systematically sown. Such a concurrence of deleterious influences (congenital disposition and bad education) too often have the effect of making a criminal of the criminal's child . . . . We, therefore, advocate a special education for those who have an *hereditary predisposition to crime*." (De Baets, quoted by Bartolo Longo.)

tions of the man of sin, the old Adam, surviving in his descendants. They are the first fruits of corrupt human nature or "concupiscence", which, according to the Council of Trent, "remains in us after Baptism, but which, though it requires us to combat, cannot injure those who do not surrender, but rather, with the grace of Christ Jesus, offer a manful resistance."[1]

These words of the Council express, in a compendious form, all that can be said of the inborn tendency to evil in the human heart. It remains in us, after original sin has been washed away by Baptism. It is not itself a sin, but the "fuel or touchwood of sin"; the slightest spark may kindle it into a flame. It never quite leaves even the holiest souls. It may at times buffet them so violently that, like St. Paul, they cry to heaven for relief. And yet, like him, they may get only the one answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee."[2]

We must not hope to be more favored than the Saints of God. Rather, adopting the motto of St. Francis Xavier, "Conquer thyself," we must be prepared for a life-long and incessant warfare against

[1] Sess. V. can. 5.

[2] 2 Cor. XII. 9. According to the most probable interpretation, the "sting of the flesh," from which the Apostle asked to be delivered, was some bodily infirmity. In the applied sense, however, the whole passage holds, with even greater force, of the rebellious concupiscence of the flesh. See Cornely, Curs. Script. Sacr.

corrupt nature. Moments of truce we may have; perfect and lasting peace we shall never enjoy, until we are delivered "from the body of this death." [1]

[1] Rom. VII. 24.

LESSON III.

The Passions — Forces for good or for evil.

The spiritual warfare which we must be ready to carry on against corrupt nature, is reduced in practice to a struggle against the passions. For the passions are the forces upon which nature mainly relies for success. Hence that propensity to evil, that inordinate appetite which we call concupiscence, that law in our members, fighting against the law of our mind and making us "captives in the law of sin."

It is all-important, therefore, to have a correct knowledge of the quality and strength of our enemies, and of the tactics, stratagems and mode of attack which they are wont to employ. For lack of this knowledge, many are taken at a disadvantage, and are badly worsted, when they might win an easy victory. What, then, are the passions?

In the air there are currents, known as trade-winds, which blow permanently in a certain direction, towards one point and away from another. They are the resultant of a number of physical forces, combined to produce a common effect. Similarly, in man there are spontaneous movements, natural likes and dislikes, which impel him steadily in a certain direction, towards one object and away from another. They

depend upon a variety of laws, which govern his physical being. Whatever is pleasurable, naturally attracts him; whatever is painful to the senses, repels him. And so there arise in him indeliberate movements of the sensitive appetite; that is, inclinations to attain some sensible good and avoid some sensible evil. Such movements, especially when they are so vehement as to cause a perceptible commotion or disturbance in the body, are called passions.[1] Besides these spontaneous movements of the sensitive appetite, there are also found in man other indeliberate emotions or affections, proper to the rational part of his nature, though they are greatly modified, in individual cases, by his bodily temperament. These, too, are correctly, but less strictly, called passions.

It is evident that passions, in the proper sense of the word, can exist in those beings only which are endowed with sensitive faculties. Angels, therefore, have no real passions. Brute animals, on the contrary, have real and sometimes violent passions. To give but one example, familiar to everyone: the dog shows unmistakable signs of affection at the return of his master, and of anger at the approach of a stranger. At one time, he fawns and cringes and begs for some mark of approval; at onother, he gets into such a

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. I. II. q. 22, a. 3; Quaest. disp. q. 24, de verit. a. 2. The word *passion* literally signifies *suffering* or *enduring*, as opposed *to acting; being moved*, instead of *moving* another.

fury, that he will allow himself to be beaten to death, rather than release his hold on his victim.

Man, having an animal body, must consequently have passions. Without them he would not be completely human. He needs them, to discharge his duty with ease and pleasure, with vigor and energy, with strength and efficiency. They are in him what electricity and magnetism are in physical nature — great forces, stored away in his being, to be called forth, at the bidding of reason, for the purposes intended by the Creator. In themselves, therefore, they do not imply defect, but perfection.[1]

Adam, before his fall, had passions.[2] The God-man, who was "in all things such as we are without sin,"[3] had passions. When He whipped the buyers and sellers out of the temple, with a scourge of platted cords, He felt truly angry, with human anger; and anger is a passion. When He caressed the little children that clambered upon his shoulders or nestled on his bosom, He felt truly affectionate, with human affection; and affection is a passion. When He said to his disciples, after the last supper, "My soul is sorrowful unto death," He felt truly sad, with human sadness; and sadness is a passion. However, just as the word 'nature' often stands for fallen nature, so the word 'passion' stands for unruly passion. And on this

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. I. II. q. 24.
[2] Id. I. q. 95.
[3] Hebr. IV. 15.

account the passions, as they existed in our Divine Lord, are usually called pro-passions; that is, they took the place of human passions, without having their imperfections.

Even in ordinary mortals the passions are not essentially bad. Else, how could the Holy Ghost counsel us to "be angry and sin not"?[1] Moses, though by nature the meekest of men, felt and showed anger, when he broke the tables of the law at the feet of the idolatrous Jews. But it was an anger, prompted by zeal for the honor of God and controlled by reason; and, therefore, instead of being evil, it was just and holy. And the same thing holds true of all the passions. Even those which are sometimes called the bad passions, are bad only in the sense that they are more liable than others to abuse or excess.

Nay more, far from being essentially bad, the passions are the natural foundation of heroic virtue and perfection.[2] No action, it is true, is of any value for heaven, unless it is done with the aid of supernatural grace; but grace presupposes nature, and builds upon it. God may indeed supply miraculously all the defects of nature; for He "is able of stones to raise up children to Abraham."[3] Yet, in the ordinary course of his providence, little is to be expected, either for heaven or for earth, of the man who is almost wholly

[1] Psalm IV. 5.
[2] St. Thomas, Sum. Theol. I. II. q. 24, a. 2.
[3] Matth., III. 9, Luke. III. 8.

devoid of passion. As a matter of fact, the Saints were, for the most part, men of strong passions. It was these which, humanly speaking, made them capable of the great and noble deeds which distinguished them among their fellow-men. In short, the heroes of the cross are cast in the same natural mould as those of the world.

What is evil in the passions is the disorder, introduced into them by sin. Since Adam's fall, they have been in a state of rebellion against reason. They resemble an unruly horse, which starts before its rider is fairly mounted, or takes the bit between its teeth and goes whithersoever its own wild impulse will carry it. In other words, they anticipate and resist the dictates of reason.

In the first place, the passions anticipate the dictates of reason. An object, naturally agreeable to the animal part of man, is presented to the external senses or to the imagination. It may be an incentive to virtue, such as a lily, sweet emblem of purity, or a picture of our Blessed Lady, fairest amongst the daughters of Eve; or it may be an incentive to sin, such as the luscious apple which tempted Eve to pluck and eat it, or the fascinating human form which stole away king David's heart. In either case, the sensitive faculty instantly experiences a feeling of pleasure, just as it experiences a feeling of relief, when one quenches his thirst with a cooling draught of water.

And, if the bodily sense is much affected, the whole being shares this feeling and begins to thrill with emotion. The animal man is thoroughly excited; and, before reason has had time to approve or disapprove, he is strongly and perhaps violently drawn towards the object of his affection. This is passion anticipating reason.

In the second place, the passions resist the dictates of reason. Once aroused, they are slow to be quieted. After the wind which woke the storm has ceased to blow, the raging billows continue to foam and roar, and to toss the affrighted mariner to and fro. After the lightning flash has passed, the thunder's roll lingers in echoes among the clouds, and prolongs the sense of danger. In like manner, after a person transported with anger has begun to listen to better counsels, his blood still boils in his veins, his eyes flash fire, his lips quiver with excitement, and the tumult and commotion of his animal nature threaten to drown the voice of conscience. This is passion resisting reason.

To express this double disorder of the passions, the ancients represented them under the form of sirens, who first fascinated men by their songs and then changed them into beasts. The passions endeavor to entice men by the pleasures of sense, and then to make them act, as if they were without reason. Hence the Holy Ghost Himself likens the

man who gives way to his passions, to "the horse and the mule that have no understanding."[1] And, elsewhere He says: "Man, when he was in honor, did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them."[2]

"There are those," exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "who are men in name, but not in feeling. If I see you lead a life at variance with the laws of right reason, why should I call you a man and not a beast? If I see you live by rapine and plunder, why should I call you a man and not a wolf? If I see you wallow in the mire of impurity, why should I call you a man and not a swine? If I see you resort to cunning and deceit, why should I call you a man and not a serpent? If I see you full of venom and spleen, why should I call you a man and not an asp? You have received a noble nature from the hand of God; but you do all in your power to degrade it. Some persons use their ingenuity, to make brute animals share, as far as possible, in the dignity of man. They domesticate the lion and teach the parrot to speak. What! You can subdue the ferocity of the lion, and you yourself are more ferocious than the lion. Worse still! Brute animals have each only one vice:[3] the

[1] Psalm XXXI. 9.

[2] Psalm XLVIII. 13.

[3] Properly speaking, brute animals have no vices. But, as an excess of passion in men is called vice, great extremes of passion in brute animals are also called vice, by way of analogy.

serpent is cunning, the asp is venomous, the wolf is rapacious. But the wicked man frequently has all their vices at the same time. How then can I call you a man, since you have divested yourself of the insignia of your dignity, of your purple and your diadem?"

In fact, the condition of the brute is less degraded than that of the slave of passion. The former feels the cravings of its passions, satisfies them and desists. The latter, on the contrary, often deliberately debases his reason to discover new ways to arouse his passions and intensify their excitement; and, when they are sated, he uses his ingenuity to stimulate them afresh and prolong their indulgence. Thus flattered and fostered, they grow daily more insolent and exacting. Before long they exercise the most despotic sway over the heart of man, and even tyrannize over his will to such an extent, that he seems incapable of refusing them anything. Under the circumstances, what is to become of him? Where will he end?

"Where are you going?" shouted one man to another, who was galloping at headlong speed upon the public highway. "Don't know, ask my horse," replied the latter. He had lost all control of the animal, and was completely at its mercy. Ask the slave of passion: "Where are you going?" And, if he is sincere, he will have to answer: "Don't know, ask my passion." He is at its mercy, and nothing

but a special providence can save him from destruction. "The man that has not learned to master his passions," writes St. Ambrose, "is borne along like an untamed steed; he is dashed to the ground, hurled down the precipice, bruised and mangled."[1]

Hence the Royal Prophet warns us: "Do not become like the horse and the mule that have not understanding. With bit and bridle bind fast their jaws."[2] Do not give your passions loose rein, nor permit them to run riot; subdue them, and train them until they obey every sign of your will. This is not an easy task. "Is is a greater hardship," writes the author of the IMITATION OF CHRIST, "to resist our vices and passions, than to toil at bodily labors."[3]

Yet we must not, on that account, become faint-hearted, but rather rouse ourselves to increased efforts. "He is not brave," remarks St. Bernard, "whose courage does not rise and whose pulse does not beat higher, when he has to contend with difficulties." Neither, on the other hand, must we ever think ourselves secure. Our enemies often seem to be dead, when they are only asleep. Upon the slightest provocation, they will awake with all their untamed fury, and surprise us, when we least expect it. Oftener still they disguise themselves as allies, in

[1] De Virgin. l. III.

[2] Psalm XXXI. 9. Bellarmin applies the words "with bit and bridle etc.," to the Almighty, who thus punishes sinners "who come not near unto" Him. (Vid. Bel. in h. l.)

[3] B. I. c. 25, n. 11.

order to betray our cause the more easily. "We are moved by passion and we think it zeal."[1] Let us not be deceived. The passions may indeed become allies, and even necessary allies, in the spiritual combat in which we are engaged. But they do not change their savage nature. They are like those native regiments of half-civilized troops, which fight valiantly under foreign officers against a common foe, but which are disposed to mutiny and to abandon their colors, at the most critical moment. It is only after years of training and discipline, if even then, that they can be at all trusted. They need to be well drilled and led.

In this manner, the Saints derived great advantage from their passions. Some of them seemed to have almost returned to the state of primitive innocence. Others, on the contrary, had to sustain the most violent assaults unto the very end. But all without exception kept rebellious nature under control, and forced it to recognize the higher law of the spirit.

Herein, according to St. Augustin, consists that peace, which is promised to all men of good will and which makes them the children of God. "Peace-makers," he says, "are called the children of God, because nothing in them is opposed to God; and therefore, they bear a resemblance to Him, as children to their father. For those persons are peace-makers in

[1] Im. Chr.

hemselves who restrain the sensual inclinations of the flesh and subject all the emotions of their souls to reason. Thus they become the kingdom of God, in which everything is orderly: what they have in common with the brute, does not resist reason; and reason itself, that noble faculty which distinguishes man from the lower creation, is submissive to that which is above all, Truth Incarnate, the only begotten Son of God. For reason cannot maintain its authority over its inferiors, unless it is perfectly obedient to its own superiors. Behold, then, what you must do, to acquire that peace which is given to men of good will, and to lead a life of consummate and perfect wisdom."[1]

[1] Lib. I. de Serm. Dom. in monte, cc. 2, 3.

LESSON IV.

Temptations — The Spiritual Combat — How it is to be carried on.

The interior peace, enjoyed in this world by the children of God, consists, as we have seen, in the subjection of the passions to reason, and of reason to its Maker. It is the fruit of many a hard-won victory, and is never quite safe from all disturbance. When our domestic foes seem to be somewhat subdued, foreign enemies, jealous of our happiness, combine their forces against us and lay siege to the fortress of the soul.

Hence our Lord says to his disciple, in the words of the IMITATION: "Son, thou art never secure in this life; but, so long as thou livest, thou wilt always need thy spiritual armor. For thou art in the midst of enemies, and art assailed on the right hand and on the left."[1] And the Holy Ghost teaches us by the lips of Job, "that the life of man on earth is a warfare."[2]

We must, therefore, like soldiers under arms, be always ready, as St. Ignatius puts it, "to bivouac by night and to fight by day;"[3] that is, we must be on

[1] B. III. c. 35.
[2] VII. 1.
[3] Contempl. "Kingdom of Christ."

the alert, at all times, to baffle or to repel the attacks of our spiritual enemies. These attacks, which we call temptations, are as varied as they are numerous. Yet, they have withal so much in common, that we can study their nature, and know beforehand how to withstand them.

What, then, is temptation? To tempt signifies, in scriptural phraseology, to make a trial of, or to put to the test, either for a good or for an evil purpose.[1] Thus we read in Genesis, that God tempted Abraham when, wishing to make a trial of his submission and obedience to the divine will, He bade him sacrifice his son Isaac.[2] In this sense, too, the Angel said to Tobias: "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."[3] On the other hand, St. Paul warns the Corinthians to beware, lest satan tempt them by abusing, unto their spiritual ruin, the knowledge which he has of their weakness.[4] And, in the same sense, St. James writes: "Let no man, when he is tempted, say that he is tempted by God; for God is not a tempter of evils, and he tempteth no one."[5]

Nevertheless, in practice, these two sorts of temptation, though so different from each other, can scarce-

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. I. q. 114. art. 2.
[2] Gen. XXII. 1.
[3] Tob. XII. 13.
[4] I Cor. VII. 5.
[5] James, I. 13.

ly be separated. For, whenever Almighty God tries his servants, satan watches his opportunity to lead them into sin; and, whenever satan assails them, Almighty God uses the occasion to strengthen them in virtue. This is a truth, strikingly exemplified in the history of the greatest Saints, both under the old and the new dispensation; and it is most consoling, as well as instructive, for all of us in the hour of temptation.

Temptation, then, regarded as an attack of our spiritual enemies, is every solicitation or enticement, employed by them to draw or allure us into sin. It may be either open or hidden, according as the designs of our chief enemy, satan, are apparent or concealed. The former kind of temptation he commonly uses against such as are addicted to sin, the latter against such as lead a life of sanctity.

"To those who easily sin mortally," writes St. Ignatius, "and who add sin to sin, our enemy is wont to present the allurements of the flesh and the senses, that he may keep them full of sins, and ever increase the amount."[1] On the contrary, in dealing with the virtuous, "it is the custom of the malignant spirit to transform himself into an Angel of light, and having known the pious desires of the soul, first to second them, then soon after to entice her to his own perverse wishes. For, at first, he usually suggests good

[1] "Spiritual Exercises — Rules for Discernment of Spirits," Set I. Rule I.

and holy thoughts, conformably to the dispositions of such a just soul, and then, drawing her by degrees into the hidden toils of his deceits, he labors to ensnare her."[1]

From these rules, however, which describe the ordinary tactics of satan, we should do wrong to infer, that one may reach a degree of virtue so exalted, as to be practically secure from all direct and open attacks. For the contrary is clearly proved, as well by the testimony of Holy Writ, as by the lives of the Saints. Even the God-man Himself was tempted by the demon to fall down and adore him. And men far advanced on the road of perfection, like St. Jerome, St. Benedict and St. Francis of Assisi, were so violently assaulted by temptations of the flesh that, in anguish of mind, they bruised their bodies with stones, plunged into freezing water and rolled themselves among brambles and briars, until all sensuous feeling had given way before physical pain.

But whether satan, appearing in his true character, makes a direct and open charge upon us, or, disguised as an Angel of light, resorts to stratagems and frauds, he never fails to call to his aid the world and the flesh; because he knows full well that without these confederates, he can never hope to overcome us.

"It is peculiar to the Creator, to enter at pleasure

[1] Id. ibid — Set II. Rule IV.

into the interior sanctuary of the soul, as into his own abode, to transform it, to take possession of it, and to fill it wholly with his divine presence."[1] Satan, on the other hand, has no access to it, unless we ourselves introduce him. But he can and does come stealthily, by the windows and open doors of our bodily senses, into the vestibule of the imagination. Thence he often succeeds in forcing his way, despite our protests, into the antechamber of the sensitive appetite and the passions. Once there, he endeavors, by threats or by flattery, to penetrate still further. At one time, he arouses such a tempest within us, that we tremble for our safety; at another, he speaks to us so blandly, that we are in danger of mistaking him for an envoy of heaven. But he can proceed no further, without our leave. The superior part of the soul cannot be unlocked, except from within. Our will has the key in its keeping; and no one can constrain it to open, because it is free.

Hence, referring to the entrance of sin into the soul, the devout Thomas à Kempis says: "First a bare thought comes to the mind, then a strong imagination, afterwards delight and evil motion and consent."[2] So that in every temptation we may distinguish three successive steps or stages: first, the simple suggestion of evil to the mind, often accompanied by

[1] St. Ignatius — "Spiritual Exercises — Rules for Discernment of Spirits," Set II. Rule II.

[2] B. I. c. 13, n. 6.

vivid imagination; secondly, the pleasurable feeling and excitement of the passions; thirdly, the consent of the will to the sin proposed.

Those, however, who lead a life of sin, take but little notice of these steps or stages of temptation. They do not feel the struggle between the spirit and the flesh, because in them the spirit is become the slave of the flesh. They do not advert to the attacks made upon them, because they are wont to surrender without offering resistance. They need not, in fact, be solicited to sin, because they go after it, of their own accord. But, when those who strive to walk according to the law of the spirit, experience the counter-attraction of the flesh, or hear the voice of the tempter, asking them to follow him, they feel, in their inmost soul, that they are suffering violence; and forthwith they sound the alarm. "When a soul is making progress in the way of salvation," observes St. Ignatius, "the good spirit touches her softly, lightly, gently, like a drop of water entering into a sponge; the evil spirit, on the contrary, strikes her rudely, sharply, violently, like a drop of water falling upon a stone. But when a soul goes from bad to worse, the very opposite happens to her. And the reason of this difference is her likeness or unlikeness to either spirit. For, if the spirit finds her like to himself, he approaches her quietly, as one enters his own house; whereas, if he finds her unlike to himself,

he comes with a noise and a commotion that are easily perceived."[1]

Apprised, then, of the enemy's approach by the disturbance which he creates, the soul has time to arm herself and to repel his attacks. So that, to experience the presence of temptation is a signal and a warning against sin, not a sin or a cause of sin. Let the assault be as violent and as importunate, as it will; it matters not. So long as we neither recklessly expose ourselves to temptation nor wilfully entertain it in our minds, we are not guilty of sin. There can be no sin, where there is no consent of the will.

There is no sin, therefore, in the suggestion of evil, or in the accompanying impression upon the imagination, when it comes to us through no fault of ours. It has come to the greatest Saints, with the express permission of God, and not unfrequently with such force, that the bare recital thereof moves us to pity. Thus we read of St. Catherine of Sienna, that the evil spirits were allowed to assail her with the most shameful carnal temptations, appearing before her in the most fascinating human guise, and inviting her the while to the enjoyment of sinful pleasures which they pictured to her under the most seductive forms. Through the senses and the imagination the tempters found their way into her soul, and seemed to her to have taken possession of it. Her will, indeed,

[1] "Rules for Discernment of Spirits," Set II. Rule VII.

fortified by the grace of God, held out against the assault. Still, so fierce and so prolonged was it, that, when afterwards our Saviour appeared to her, she asked Him: "Where wast Thou, my dearest Lord, while my heart was so full of darkness and filth?" — "Even within thy heart, my child." — "What! within my heart," exclaimed the Saint in amazement; "dost Thou make Thy abode in foul and loathsome places?" — "Tell me," replied our Lord, "did those vile thoughts cause thee joy or sadness, delight or affliction?" — "The profoundest sadness and affliction," rejoined the virgin. — "And who was it, my child, that put so much sadness and affliction into thy heart, if not I who had hid myself in thy heart of hearts? Believe me, had I not been there, those thoughts which so beset thy will, would have surely vanquished it. Thou wouldst have given them admission and entertained them with pleasure. But, because I was within thy heart, thou didst thy best to resist the temptation; and, as thou wast unable to do all that thou wouldst fain have done, thy disgust increased the more; so that the struggle served to strengthen thy virtue and to enhance thy merit."[1]

Once more, then, there is no sin in the suggestion of evil, and in the imagination to which it gives rise, if they come to us without any fault of ours. Neither

[1] St. Francis de Sales, "Introduction to a Devout Life," part IV. ch. IV.

is there sin in the sensible pleasure and the excitement of the passions which may chance to follow, so long as the will neither harbors them nor approves of them. The sensible pleasure and the excitement of the passions, felt in the inferior part of the soul, are often wholly beyond our control, and therefore not imputable to us.

This truth is strikingly confirmed, as St. Francis de Sales remarks, by the well known example of the youthful martyr whom St. Jerome mentions in his writings. Tortures having failed to overcome the constancy of this dauntless champion of the faith, his executioners had recourse to the power of carnal allurements, binding him hand and foot, though gently and with silken cords, and leaving him at the mercy of a shameless wanton.[1] Think you, asks St. Francis de Sales, that under these circumstances, he experienced no sense of pleasure or that he was surprised by no strange emotions? There can be no reasonable doubt about the matter. And yet, despite the dreadful siege which he endured, he did not surrender. For, deprived of every other means of self-defense, he bit off his tongue and spat it in the tempter's face: thus showing that, though his animal nature was controlled by the enemy, his spiritual soul remained unconquered still.

[1] The same fact, or a similar one, is recorded in the Roman Martyrology, July 28.

The distinction, so sharply drawn in this particular instance, between our animal instincts and our spiritual faculties, cannot be too much insisted upon. It is of supreme importance, in as much as it applies not only to the grosser temptations which, like those of impurity or anger, depend very much upon one's bodily temperament, but to others also which, like those of blasphemy or infidelity, address themselves more directly to the mind. For, even in the latter kind of temptations, satan, acting upon the bodily organs or upon the imagination, can produce feelings and emotions which a tender conscience is apt to mistake for deliberate consent, though the will is very far from countenancing them.

It sometimes happens that, in consequence of a sudden nervous shock, a person falls into a swoon, and that unable to give any apparent signs of life, he is thought by bystanders to have died suddenly. But if, on putting their hands to his heart, they discover that it still beats, they conclude that life is not extinct, and that, if they can but administer some restorative, consciousness and strength will soon return. In like manner, under the stress of violent temptation, the soul may be so overpowered, that she can give no signs of spiritual life. When this happens, apply your hand to her heart; that is, to the will. And, if you find that it continues to perform its functions, by refusing to approve of the temptation and of the pleas-

urable sensation which it produces, rest assured that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, the supernatural life of the soul is not extinct, and that, with the aid of the heavenly restoratives of prayer and the sacraments, she will before long regain her accustomed strength and vigor.[1]

After all, nothing can bring about the death of the soul, except moral suicide. Nothing can separate her from God, or deprive her of sanctifying grace, which is her life, except a deliberate act of the will. So long, therefore, as the will is true to God, all is well. "If I wish to be the friend of God," observes St. Augustin, "I forthwith become such."[2] Truly, this is encouraging; because, as the same Saint teaches, "nothing is so easy to a man of good will, as his good will itself, and God asks no more."[3] Whenever he finds it in us, He does not fail us: for, as the Apostle assures us, "God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able, but will make also with the temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."[4] So that it is always in the power of the good will, not to succumb to temptation.

But it is not always in the power of the good will, to evade the attacks of temptation. Nay, rather, the

[1] St. Francis de Sales, l. c.

[2] "Amicus Dei esse si voluero, ecce nunc fio." Confess.

[3] "Nihil tam facile bonae voluntati est, quam ipsa sibi, et haec sufficit Deo." Serm. 9 de verb. Dom.

[4] I Cor., X, 13.

Holy Ghost expressly warns us: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, prepare thy soul for temptation;"[1] that is, take for granted that, if you are in earnest about serving God, you will be tempted, and therefore arm yourself for the combat.

And how should we prepare ourselves for temptation? How should we arm ourselves for the combat?

Before all else, answer spiritual writers, consider on what side you are most open to attack; because on that side, as is evident, you have most to fear. "Our adversary," according to the teaching of St. Ignatius, "is wont to imitate a military leader, who wishes to take and plunder a fortress which he has besieged. For, as such a leader first explores the nature and defences of the place and then attacks it at the weakest point, even so the enemy of human nature goes around, skilfully inquiring what virtues, theological, cardinal or moral, the soul possesses or lacks, and then brings all his engines to bear against the part which he has discovered to be less strengthened and guarded than others, in the hope of forcing her to surrender."[2]

Taking warning, then, from the conduct of the enemy, we should examine where we are weakest and shun an encounter from that quarter; or, if that be impossible, we should strengthen the outworks of the

[1] Ecclus. II. 1.

[2] "Rules for Discernment of Spirits," Set I. Rule 14.

soul against his approach. Or, to apply another figurative expression, used by St. Gregory, we should watch from afar the darts which the enemy hurls at us, in order to avoid them, if we can, or else to receive them upon our shields. "The shafts which we see coming from a distance, are less liable to hurt us." [1]

In general, it is expedient to be beforehand with temptation, by "going counter to our sensual inclinations and to the love of self and of the world," even when they do not draw us to what is directly sinful.[2]

By so doing, we cut off the forces upon which our enemy chiefly relies, and thereby cripple him to such an extent that he can do us no serious harm. Denying ourselves even what is lawful, we run little risk of doing what is unlawful. In this sense, it is always well to be on the offensive rather than on the defensive, to begin the attack instead of waiting to repel it. Sometimes, also, it is well to challenge the enemy and to provoke an attack. Thus, for example, in order to exercise ourselves in patience, we may deliberately seek the occasions which will put it to the test, if we are morally certain that, armed with the grace of God, we shall carry off the victory.

But, as an ordinary rule, it is a duty, if possible, to shun a direct attack, especially in the case of temptations which appeal agreeably to our sensual nature.

[1] Hom. 35 in Evang.

[2] "Spiritual Exercises," Meditation on the "Kingdom of Christ."

This duty becomes imperative, when we have good reason to fear, that we shall be worsted in the conflict. To expose ourselves, through our own fault, to temptations for which we are not prepared, is to rush headlong to destruction. It is not courage but foolhardiness; it is doing what the demon wished our Lord to do, when he invited Him to fling Himself from the pinnacle of the temple, with the expectation that the angels would bear Him upon their hands; it is tempting God, because it is counting upon a miracle of grace, to rescue us from the spiritual danger which we ourselves have invited. Such presumption is usually punished, as it deserves, by a withdrawal of those special helps, without which we shall most certainly fall. God saved the Hebrew youths from the Babylonian furnace; but they did not disport amid the raging flames for their own amusement. He saved St. Peter from the waves; but the Apostle did not walk upon the furious waters in a spirit of bravado.

All this is only saying in other words, that we are bound to shun the proximate occasions of sin, and that, unless we do so when we can, we thereby forfeit the grace of God and become guilty of sin. We have the authority of the Holy Ghost Himself for saying, that "he that loveth the danger, shall perish in it."[1]

But it is not enough to avoid temptation when we see it coming from a distance; we must, moreover,

[1] Ecclus. III. 27.

turn away from it, when it chances to overtake us, or to confront us unawares. Do not look at it; its glance is like the basilisk's, that was believed to fascinate those whom it wished to slay. Do not listen to it; its voice is like the sirens', that were supposed to enchant those whom they endeavored to decoy. Do not dally with it; its touch is as deadly poison. Do not debate with it; its arguments are sophisms, which you try in vain to refute. While temptation is upon you, it is impossible for you to reason with your wily opponent. Nor is it necessary. He deserves no answer save our Lord's "Begone, satan." Scorn his advances, spurn him from you, and very soon he will depart, as he "departed" from Christ, at least "for a time." He is a haughty spirit, and cannot bear to be despised.

Above all, be not startled or surprised at the approach of temptation, and give no outward signs of trouble or alarm. The stormy petrel, it is said, rides upon the thunder cloud, fearless of the war of the elements which is going on around it. So should we move forward on our own course, undismayed by the spiritual storms that rage around us. Even the "whirlwind" has within it a "heart of peace." So should we, though temptations compass us about, have within us a "heart of peace."

Courage and self-possession disconcert the enemy of our souls, while fear and perturbation of mind em-

bolden him the more. "The demon is accustomed to lose hope and strength," says St. Ignatius, "when he sees the spiritual athlete resist the temptation with a stout heart and fearless front, by doing the very opposite of what is set before him. On the other hand, if he perceives that he becomes alarmed and seems, as it were, to give away to despair, there is no beast on the face of the earth more infuriated than this enemy of human nature nor more pertinacious in following up his perverse intention."[1] Hence, so long as we are under temptation, we must take care not to slacken in our good resolves or to "make any change concerning our purpose of mind or state of life, but hold fast to what had been previously determined."[2]

"It is very profitable, however," adds St. Ignatius, "so to change our mode of action, that we may make a vigorous resistance, by being more earnest in prayer, meditation and self-examination, and by performing some additional penance."[3] As soon, therefore, as you perceive the approach of temptation, have recourse to prayer. It is the advice of our Lord Himself: "Pray that ye enter not into temptation."[4] Fly to God, as to "a tower of strength against the face of the enemy."[5] "Our God is our refuge and our strength, a

[1] "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," Set 1. Rule XII.

[2] Id. ibid., Rule V.

[3] Id. ibid., Rule VI.

[4] Matth. XXVI. 41.

[5] Ps. LX. 4.

helper in troubles which have found us exceedingly," exclaims the Psalmist; "therefore we will not fear." [1] "The Lord is the protector of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?" — "If armies in camp should stand against me, my heart shall not fear." [2] Cry out and say: "Lord, I suffer violence, answer Thou for me." [3] — "I will not deny Thee." [4] — "Permit me not to be separated from Thee; from the wicked foe defend me." [5]

Should the temptation be importunate, and, above all, should it put on the semblance of good, unbosom yourself to your confessor or director. According to God's ordinary providence, men must be guided and saved by the ministry of their fellow-men. Those who depart from this law, however learned and experienced they may be, are exposed to grievous illusions. Those, on the contrary, who confide themselves with childlike simplicity into the hands of their appointed guides, are secured from spiritual danger. Often the simple fact of disclosing the temptation, dispels it forever.

Listen again to St. Ignatius: "Just as a deceitful man, wishing to mislead the daughter of virtuous parents or the wife of a good husband, takes the ut-

[1] Ps. XLV. 2, 3.
[2] Ps. XXVI. 3.
[3] Isaias XXXVIII. 14.
[4] Matth. XXVI. 35.
[5] Prayer, "O Soul of Christ."

most care that his words and counsels be kept secret, and fears nothing more than that the daughter make them known to her father or the wife to her husband — because he is aware that, in that case, he cannot carry out his schemes — so likewise the devil does his best, to induce the soul, which he wishes to circumvent, to keep his deceitful suggestions secret, and he is greatly displeased, when she makes them known to her confessor or spiritual director, because he understands that, such being the case, it is all over with his attempts ''[1]

"When the enemy of human nature has been detected by his serpentine tail," continues St. Ignatius, "that is, by the evil end to which he tries to lead us, it is very profitable to go over the whole series of ideas and to mark what web of good thoughts he at first wove, and how he endeavored by degrees to infuse his own venom: that thus his deceits, having become known by experience of this kind, may be more easily guarded against for the future.''[2]

In general, to guard against temptations which put on the appearance of good, we must diligently examine the series of our thoughts. "If their beginning, middle and end be all good, tending to what is altogether good, it is a sign that they are from the good Angel. But if in the course of the ideas any-

[1] Id. ibid. Rule XIII.
[2] Id. Set II. Rule VI.

thing is presented, or follows, which is bad in itself, which calls away from good, which impels to a less good than the soul had previously determined upon, or which weakens, harasses or disquiets her, taking away the peace and tranquillity, which she had before, it is an evident sign that such thoughts are from the malignant spirit, the enemy of our advancement and of our everlasting salvation."[1]

From all this it is clear that temptation, under whatever form it may come, is of the greatest benefit to the soul that loves God.

In the first place, it is an exercise of virtue; and exercise developes and perfects the moral as well as the physical being. There are savages who think, that the strength of a vanquished foe passes into the victor; and, consequently, that the more hostile braves they slay, the more valiant they themselves will become. It is an idle fancy, to be sure; because it is not another's qualities that enter into us, but our own that are evolved, by overcoming difficulty and opposition. Yet beneath this idle fancy there lies concealed a truth, which is quite as applicable to the order of grace as of nature: the more spiritual enemies we subdue, the more virtuous shall we ourselves become. Temptation, therefore, though it appears to be a sign of weakness, serves to draw out the strength

[1] Id. ibid. Rule V.

that is in us. So true is it, that "Power is made perfect in infirmity."[1]

Again, temptation is a struggle for the mastery between the spirit and the flesh, between Christ and the world, between God and satan. It furnishes us an opportunity to show allegiance to our Lord, and to merit that heavenly crown which is not bestowed on any one, "except he strive lawfully."[2] It is a test of our fidelity to God, who, wishing to make us worthy of Himself, proves us, as gold is proved in the furnace, and receives our efforts to resist temptation as a holocaust most acceptable in his divine sight.[3]

Wherefore St. James writes: "My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience, and patience hath a perfect work; that you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing."[4]

[1] 2 Cor., XII. 9.
[2] 2 Tim., II. 5.
[3] Wisd., III. 5, 6.
[4] James, I. 2, 3, 4.

LESSON V.

The Predominant Passion — Pride or Sensuality.

It has been said, that a man's biography is a portrait of his predominant passion, working itself out in his life and actions. And rightly so; for, just as a portrait is a likeness of a man's external appearance, so a biography is a likeness of his internal disposition.

A portrait must faithfully represent the cast of his countenance, the expression of his eyes, the carriage of his body, everything in a word that enables us to recognize him at a glance. The filling out of the picture, the shading and coloring, the last delicate touches which give it life and finish, must all serve to bring out to advantage his distinctive traits.

In like manner, a biography must faithfully represent his temper of mind, his principles of conduct, and all else that helps to make him better known. The particular facts recorded of him, his relations with others, the episodes and incidents which relieve the monotony of the narrative, must all tend to illustrate his personal character.

Now, it is a man's predominant passion which, more than aught else, contributes to mark his character, and which imparts to his whole life its own peculiar tone and color. It influences alike the saint

and the sinner. It conducts the former to perfection and hurries the latter to perdition. It frequently decides upon the future career of the young, and shapes their destiny for time and eternity. It strives, on all occasions, to have the upper hand, to control and to govern; and, however much it may have been thwarted and repressed, it infallibly reasserts itself, as soon as it has the slightest opportunity. Thence its name of predominant passion, or ruling passion, or master passion.

Manifestly, then, it is highly important for us, to know our own predominant passion, and the predominant passion of those whom we are called upon to guide. To know it, is to possess the key to a man's interior disposition, to his capabilities and weaknesses, to his attractions and aversions. To subjugate it, is to win a complete victory over perverse nature.

But here, at the very outset, we encounter a great difficulty. There is in the human breast a tumult of warring passions, all seemingly struggling for the mastery. To begin with, there are love and anger, the primitive and most comprehensive forms of passion, two phases of the same natural activity, tending towards good and fleeing from evil. Then there are the passions immediately derived from them, or closely allied to them. Such are, on the one hand, joy and sadness, desire and aversion; and, on the other hand, hope and despair, courage and fear. These

again give rise to swarms of other passions, thick and black as the plagues of flies and other insects, which sprang up under the rod of Moses and infested the land of Egypt. Pride and vain-glory and self-conceit, arrogance and haughtiness and disdain, grief and melancholy and despondency, shame and confusion and remorse, affection and pity and sympathy, hatred and scorn and contempt, fury and rage and revenge, and countless other emotions, often of the most violent kind, take possession by turns of every avenue of the soul and keep it in a state of perpetual siege. Which of all these has the lead in our hearts? Which is our predominant passion?

"The predominant passion of every man," say some experienced directors of the spiritual life, "is self-love." And they say truly. For man, by the very necessity of his nature, seeks his own happiness; and consequently he feels instinctively a sense of satisfaction in the contemplation of everything that tends to increase that happiness. Every excellence possessed, every praiseworthy action performed, every good attained, furnishes material for self-congratulation.

Nor is all love of self to be condemned.[1] On the contrary, we are obliged to love ourselves, and to love ourselves before all others. For "he that is evil to himself, to whom will he be good?"[2] asks the Holy

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. I. II. q. 77. art. 4.
[2] Ecclus. XIV. 5.

Ghost. Nay, the love of self is made the model of our love of others. When our Saviour was asked by a doctor of the law, which is the greatest commandment, He answered: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and first commandment." Then He added: "And the second is like to this; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."[1] Mark that He does not say, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as much as thyself," but simply, "as thyself." That is, we must love our neighbor for the same reasons as ourselves; because he too is a creature, made in the image and likeness of God; because he too was redeemed with the precious blood of Christ; because he too is destined to possess the kingdom of heaven. But we must love ourselves first of all, and then our fellow-men, in the order of their relation to ourselves: our family and kinsfolk, our country and nation, that are, as it were, an extension of our own personality, before others, not bound to us by similar ties.

What is to be condemned, is all inordinate love of ourselves and of our own; because it is unjust to God and to men, a violation of the rights of the Creator and of the creature.[2] Our plain duty then, is

[1] Matth. XXII. 37, 38, 39.

[2] The love of kinsfolk and country is designated in Latin by the word "pietas", the nearest English equivalent of which seems to be "natural affection" (See St. Thomas,

to root it up from our hearts. It is an evil tree, which "cannot bring forth good fruit."[1] It resembles the fatal upas-tree of tropical lands. Its trunk, its boughs, its branches, its leaves, its fruit, are all poisonous.

Now, its main boughs are two. For, since man is a compound of soul and body, his self-love may be directed either towards the spiritual part of his being, or towards its material part. A well-ordered love of the soul will be a stimulus to noble and generous efforts; an inordinate love will show itself in some form of pride or vain glory. A well-ordered love of the body will prompt a moderate care of health; an inordinate love will end in sensuality, which, in its grossest form, is called impurity.

Sum. Theol. II. II. q. 101., and Rickaby "Aquinas Ethicus" in h. l.) So long as it remains in its proper bounds, it is a natural virtue, which we should all cultivate with care, and make meritorious of heaven, by infusing it with a supernatural motive. It should appear in our sincere attachment to our kinsfolk, and our patriotic devotion to the best interests of our country. But when it goes beyond its proper bounds, and becomes "inordinate," it is the fruitful source of innumerable vices. Inordinate love of kinsfolk leads to narrowness, exclusiveness, and unreasonable prejudices against those who are not of the same blood with ourselves — notably, to clannishness and nepotism, which have wrought incalculable mischief in Church and State. Inordinate love of country leads to disregard for the rights of other nations, unjust wars, invasions and rapine — in short, to the open contempt of the first principle of the Natural Law, expressed in that unholy and most unpatriotic saying, "My country, right or wrong."

[1] Matth. VII. 18.

We may now readily understand what spiritual writers mean, when they tell us, that there are two wild beasts which lay waste the mystical garden of the soul: the lion and the bear. Under this figurative language, they represent the two principal passions of the human heart. The lion, king of animals, means pride; the bear, a beast with filthy, groveling instincts, denotes sensuality. Let us study their nature and habits attentively.

Pride is an inordinate desire of excellence, leading to an overweening self-esteem and a craving for undue superiority.[1] Closely allied to pride, and, in some of its forms identical with it, is vain-glory or vanity. It consists in an inordinate love of glory, fame and renown. In common language, however, vanity usually stands for a childish esteem of another's approval, won by some paltry advantage possessed, or some trifling success achieved. Taking vanity in this sense, it is true to say, as an English writer has said, that a man may be too proud to be vain. It is the mark of a weak character, and utterly incompatible with true greatness.

Sensuality is an inordinate love of the comforts and pleasures of sense, inclining or predisposing a man to gratify and indulge his bodily feelings and his carnal instincts in everything.[2] In its grosser form

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol., II. II. q. 162. art. 1. 3.
[2] St. Thom. Sum. Theol., I. q. 81.

of impurity, especially, it is a low, beastly passion, wholly unworthy of a rational being.

Pride is a passion which persons, who are highly endowed, generally have most to dread. It was by pride, that the angels fell, though in them it was not a passion, in the proper sense of the word. They were so elated at the sight of their own excellence, that they refused to recognize their dependence upon God, and wished to be a law and standard of right and wrong to themselves. "I will ascend into heaven," exclaimed their leader, "I will exalt my throne above the stars . . . . I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High."[1] It was by pride, that our first parents fell. They, too, were so elated at the sight of their own excellence, that they refused to recognize their dependence upon God, and wished to be a law and standard of right and wrong to themselves. They believed the tempter, who told them, "you shall be as gods."[2] It was by pride, that those demon intellects fell, who, "in the conceit of their hearts," raised the banner of revolt against the Most High and his representatives upon earth: those schismatics who rent the seamless garment of the Christian faith, those heretics who sowed the seeds of false doctrine in the fields of the Church, those unbelievers who tried to sap and mine the foundations of all religion.[3]

[1] Isaias, XIV. 13, 14. [2] Gen., III. 5.
[3] St. Thom. Sum. Theol., II. II. q. 162. art. 2.

The ordinary sins of pride which men commit, such as thoughts of self-complacency which they deliberately cherish, are not, it is true, of a grievous character. Nevertheless all pride, especially pride of intellect, is a very dangerous passion, and the fruitful source of countless crimes. It tends, of its very nature, to destroy the essential relations between the creature and the Creator, and to put man in the place of God. [1]

Sensuality, a passion which is often mainly due to the natural habit of the body, is, in the strictest sense, a rebellion of the flesh. It was for sins of sensuality, or, as the Almighty Himself expresses it, because man was flesh,[2] that almost all the human race was swept away by the deluge. It was for sins of sensuality, that the Cities of the Plains were destroyed by a rain of "brimstone and fire." [3] It was for sins of sensuality, that whole nations, once great and mighty, gradually degenerated and almost disappeared from the face of the earth.

All sensual indulgence clouds the intellect of man and dulls his other faculties. It tends, of its own nature, to destroy the essential relations between the spiritual and the material, and to subject the soul to the body.

Between pride and sensuality, therefore, though they are evidently very dissimilar, there is never-

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol., II. II. q. 162. art. 5, 6.
[2] Gen., VI, 3.
[3] Gen., XIX, 24.

theless a striking analogy, pithily expressed by some spiritual writers in the words, "Pride is the impurity of the soul, and impurity is the pride of the body." They are, in fact, two forms of inordinate self-love, struggling for the mastery over our hearts. The one which succeeds in intrenching itself most firmly, is our predominant passion. How shall we discover it? How shall we distinguish it? Chiefly by the following rules:

In the first place, the predominant passion is usually the source of our daily failings and shortcomings.

Let us, then, ask ourselves in all sincerity: What is the burden of our examinations of conscience and of our ordinary confessions? Have we any pet sins? Any weaknesses, for which we cherish a sort of natural fondness, without which life seems to lose much of its charm, and into which, as a consequence, we fall most frequently and deliberately?

Are we forever busy with thoughts of self, feeding on the remembrance of our past achievements, or building air-castles of future greatness? Are we accustomed to sing our own praises, to make ourselves the heroes of every story, and, perhaps, to purchase the praise of others at the expense of strict truth? Are we disposed to resent the least slight or neglect, as an affront beyond endurance, to brood over our real or imaginary wrongs, to nurse thoughts of

revenge against those who do not make much of us? Are we fond of dress and personal adornments? Do we try to attract the attention of others by excessive finery of apparel? Do we pine away with envy, when some one else has made a more favorable impression than ourselves? If so, we shall easily recognize our predominant passion to be some form of pride or vanity.

Are we habitually sluggish and indolent? Do we fail to rouse ourselves to action, even at the call of duty? Do we spend our lives in sleep, in listlessness, in day-dreaming? Are we given to the pleasures of the table? Do we waste precious time in idle gossip, in social entertainments, in frivolous amusements? Do we give free rein to our senses and allow them many dangerous liberties? If we have to answer these and similar questions in the affirmative, there can be little doubt that our predominant passion is some form of sensuality. If, however, we are still in doubt about our predominant passion, we may have recourse to another rule which we shall now explain.

In the second place, then, the predominant passion commonly has the upper hand in a conflict with other passions.

To understand the meaning of this rule, we must bear in mind, that the passions are forces, divergent and often antagonistic, acting in different, if not opposite, directions. The stronger prevails over the

weaker, neutralizes its influence, or changes its direction. Thus it may happen, that purely natural and imperfect motives will restrain men from the commission of certain crimes, or that one vice will impede or check another.

An example will make the matter clear. Take the case of an infidel, physically predisposed to sensuality. Conscientious motives do not deter him from indulging his inclinations always and everywhere. Yet, whenever some great personal interest is at stake, whenever his standing in the community, or reputation as an orator, politician or statesman is concerned, he invariably overcomes himself. Not only does he refrain from all sinful excesses, but he denies himself even the most innocent diversions, foregoes the pleasures of society, forgets his meals, and labors day and night without taking nourishment or repose. It is clear, that his ambition or pride is strong enough to overcome his sensuality.

If, on the other hand, nothing can arouse him from his habitual torpor or keep him from his favorite amusements, if no considerations of honor or of health can hinder him from giving himself over to the most shameful self-indulgence, it is equally clear, that his sensuality has the better of his other passions.

By these means, it is generally easy to discover one's predominant passion. Sometimes, however, the

various tendencies of the heart are so nearly balanced or so vague and unsteady, that it is impossible to say, with any degree of certainty, which of them prevails over the others. When this happens, we must not waste time in useless endeavors to find out our predominant passion, but rather direct our efforts to the extirpation of our ordinary failings that are known to us.

It is well also to remember that some forms of passion naturally become weaker with time, while other forms of the same passion just as naturally become stronger. Vanity, for example, ordinarily diminishes with age, while pride of intelleet is apt to increase. The cravings of lust grow less importunate with declining years, while the propensity to the excessive use of stimulants often grows more and more violent. Finally, owing to a person's own fault or the force of circumstances, inclinations to evil, which he has not hitherto experienced, may be created and developed. Thus it comes to pass, that the predominant passion varies, more or less, with varying years.

Still, as an ordinary rule, all of us have some well-defined predominant passion, which accompanies us through life. It is our duty to make all reasonable efforts to discover it and, after discovering it, to labor strenuously to subdue it.

So did the Saints; and with such success, that

they were distinguished for the virtues most opposed to their predominant passions. Those whose natural character inclined them to pride and haughtiness, excelled in humility and meekness; those whose bodily temperament predisposed them to sensuality and self-indulgence, became models of mortification and self-restraint.

Whosoever has succeeded in subduing his predominant passion, has advanced far upon the road towards perfection. But he has not yet reached the goal. The next step that he must take, consists in enlisting the passions actively in the service of virtue: or, as we expressed ourselves in a previous lesson, in making allies of them. For all the passions contain an element of good which we may turn to great profit, by guiding and directing it.

In the passion of sensuality, this element of good is not perhaps apparent at first sight. Nevertheless it certainly exists. It is that exquisite sensitiveness to pleasure and pain, natural to persons of certain kinds of temperament. If such persons flatter their sensuality, they gradually lose all feeling for everything except their own personal gratification. They become harsh and cruel towards others, and often take a positive delight in torturing them. If, on the contrary, they resist their sensuality, by the practice of self-denial and mortification, they overflow with kindness towards their fellow-men. Theirs is the generous

soul, which opens wide the pursestrings of wealth to relieve the starving poor; theirs the soft hand, which smooths the pillow and cools the feverish brow of the sick; theirs the compassionate glance, which welcomes back the repentant sinner; theirs the tender heart, which bleeds for every sort of human misery.

In the passion of pride, the element of good which it contains, is not difficult to discern. It is that nobility of soul[1] which thinks little of any of its achievements, so long as there is something more excellent to aspire to; which forgets the things that are behind, in order to press forward, with ever increasing energy, towards those that are ahead; which is never satisfied with what it has, because its desires are vast enough to embrace all the world. It caused an Alexander to weep, because he could not lead his victorious hosts into other lands; it caused a Francis Xavier to sigh, because he could not carry the light of the Gospel to other nations. Both lived and labored for glory. But while the former had his gaze fixed on the earth, the latter had it fixed on heaven. With the Divine Master he could say; "I seek not my own glory."[2] With the Apostle of the Gentiles, he could exclaim: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me and I to the world."[3]

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol., II. II. q. 162.
[2] John, VIII. 50.
[3] Gal. VI. 14.

LESSON VI.

The subduing of sensuality. — Mortification or crucifixion of the flesh with its vices and evil inclinations.

Fallen man is naturally prone to indulge his sensuality. He shrinks from bodily sufferings and craves for bodily pleasures. And the latter, even when they are not in themselves sinful, are very liable to excesses and abuses. Thus it happens, that the flesh gets the better of the spirit, and tyrannizes over it, instead of obeying and serving it.

In the very first age of the world, "all flesh had corrupted its way" to such an extent, that God "repented that He made man on the earth," and said: "My spirit shall not remain in man forever, because he is flesh."[1] And, since that day, "the concupiscence of the flesh" has been one of the three forces of evil which, on the authority of the Apostle, hold despotic sway in this world.

In our times, this force has acquired additional strength from the altered conditions of human society at large, and from the surroundings amid which we live. With the advance of material civilization, the means of enjoyment have rapidly increased; and the

[1] Genes., VI. 3.

desire for enjoyment has increased more rapidly still. Indeed, it is hardly too much to say, that the great aim of the masses, the goal of their ambition, the Eden of their longings is expressed in the magic little word, "comfort." Very many make the sensible good, freedom from physical suffering and possession of material comforts, the principal object of life. Not a few pursue pleasure simply for pleasure's sake, and endeavor to crowd as much enjoyment as possible into the brief span of their existence here below. And some go so far as to say, that they wish for a "life of enjoyment, short but intense."

All this is only translating into modern language the words, which the Holy Ghost puts into the mouth of the wicked voluptuary: "The time of our life is short and tedious . . . . . We are born of nothing, and after this we shall be as if we had not been . . . . Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments: and let not the flower of time pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with roses before they are withered: let no meadow escape our riot. Let none of us go without his part in luxury: let us everywhere leave tokens of joy: for this is our portion, and this is our lot." [1]

Nothing could be more at variance with the

[1] Wisd., II.

example and the teachings of Christ, whose "whole life upon earth," as the author of the IMITATION reminds us, "was a cross and a martyrdom." Our Lord Himself says: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."[1] Follow whither? and how far? Even to Calvary and to crucifixion; so that St. Paul sets it down as a general principle, that "they who are Christ's, have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences."[2]

And yet Christ came to bring peace and joy upon earth. "Peace to men of good will" and "joy that shall be to all the people," was the message delivered by the Angels who announced his birth. Yea, peace and joy, even in this world; but peace and joy through pain, through sorrow, through affliction, through the cross.

Listen to our Lord's own invitation! "Come to me all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you . . . . and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is sweet, and my burden light."[3] Surely, there is no mistaking his meaning. It is, as though He said: Take upon you the yoke of my commandments, the burden of my cross, and carry it courageously after me, because there is no other means of obtaining rest for your souls; and, in spite of all appearances to the contrary,

[1] Matth., XVI. 24.
[2] Gal., V. 24.
[3] Matth., XI. 28, 29, 30.

my yoke is really sweet and my burden light. Elsewhere He expresses the same idea even more emphatically, when He says: "Except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish."[1] Truly, this seems a hard saying. Yet it is the saying of Him who came down from heaven for the salvation of men, of Him who, while upon earth, went about "doing good"[2] and relieving the suffering of all that appealed to his compassionate Heart; of Him who so loved us, that He laid down his life for his friends. He would most certainly cause us no pain, unless He thought it necessary. There must, then, be some mysterious virtue in penance, when it is practised with the proper dispositions. And so there is. For, without penance, we shall all perish; without penance, there is no peace, no joy, no happiness for fallen men — for all that have committed sin, or that are in danger of committing it. And why so? A little reflection on the nature of sin and of penance will suggest the reason at once.

Sin is "a wilful transgression or breaking of the divine law." But a law necessarily implies a lawgiver who makes known his will by means of it, and a purpose or end which is to be attained by observing it. The Supreme Lawgiver is God Almighty, and the purpose or end of every law is the establishment or preservation of order. Sin is, therefore, in the first

[1] Luke, XIII. 5.
[2] Acts, X. 38.

place, an opposition to the Supreme Lawgiver, a defiance of his authority, a contempt of his will. "Hence, in Holy Scripture, it is called an offense against God, impiety or ungodliness;"[1] and, as such, it "is principally considered by theologians" and spiritual writers.[2] It is, in the second place, a frustrating, so far as that is possible, of the end which God had in view in making his law, a marring of the order which He has established, a ruining of his work. "Hence," St. Augustin says, "sin is a subversion or perversion of order."[3]

These "two elements," which "go to make up a sin,"[4] must not be confounded; because, though they are found, to a certain extent, in every sin, they are really distinct and produce distinct evil effects. When Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, in spite of the divine will clearly manifested to him, he was guilty of a gross personal insult and treason against the Sovereign Majesty of God "whom, virtually at least, he would not have for his last end;"[5] and therefore he drew upon himself the divine wrath. Moreover, by disturbing the established order of things, he spoiled the plan of the Creator. — To live for a time in a paradise of delights, free from sufferings and struggles

[1] Suarez, Tract. V. de vit. et pec. disp. I. sect. 1. nn. 4. 5.
[2] St. Thom. Sum. Theol., I. II. q. 71. art. 6.
[3] Suarez, l. c.
[4] St. Thom. Sum. Theol., I. II. q. 72. art. 1.
[5] Suarez, l. c.

of every kind, then to be translated to heaven without passing through "the gates of death," and to share forever in God's own happiness: this was to have been Adam's lot, had he been willing to prove his allegiance to his Maker by one easy act of self-restraint. How beautiful, how perfect the plan! By interfering with it, he introduced manifold disorder and confusion into the work of God: disorder and confusion in his own will; disorder and confusion in his passions; disorder and confusion in the lower creation, followed by a host of evils, which invaded the whole world and brought about the temporal death of all and the eternal death of many.

In the same manner, whenever we wilfully break the law of God, we do Him a double injury: we cause Him personal displeasure and we disturb the order of his creation. To repair this double injury, is the work of penance, which, as St. Augustin tells us, is a sorrow, grief or affliction, a suffering or penalty, by which one voluntarily punishes himself for the wrong, which he has voluntarily done by committing sin.[1] It is of two kinds, interior and exterior, corresponding to the two elements of evil found in every sin. The former, in the words of St. Augustin, is "a sorrow, grief or affliction," that is, a heartfelt contrition for the sins committed, with a firm purpose of amendment. The latter, which is the fruit of the

[1] De vera et falsa poen. cc. 8, 18, 19.

former,[1] is a "suffering or penalty, by which one voluntarily punishes himself for the wrong which he has voluntarily done by committing sin."

Without interior penance, it is absolutely impossible to obtain pardon for the personal offence offered to Almighty God. To recover His friendship, we must begin, in the very nature of things, with an act of humble submission, retracting and detesting the sins by which we have insulted his Divine Majesty. But, besides suing for pardon, we are bound, so far as in us lies, to restore the order which we have marred. Now, this is the object of exterior penance, also called mortification. It is of this penance that the Apostle speaks, when he exhorts us to carry always "the mortification of Christ in our bodies."[2] It is to this that he refers, when he tells us, that "they who are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences."[3]

Remark, that he does not say simply "they who have crucified their flesh," but "they who have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences." And why so? Because exterior penance or mortification is not confined to bodily austerities, which tend directly to macerate the flesh; such as fasting, scourging and haircloths. It embraces all kinds of

[1] St. Ignatius, "Spiritual Exercises," First Week, 10th Addition.

[2] 2 Cor., IV. 10.

[3] Gal., V. 24.

penitential practices, in which "the bodily faculties," the imagination or the senses have a share; such as the subduing of our passions, the checking of our natural inclinations, the moderating of our affections.[1] Thus understood, exterior penance is necessary, both as an atonement for past sin and as a preservative from future sin.

It is necessary as an atonement for past sin. For, "since sin is an inordinate act," argues St. Thomas, "it is manifest that whosoever sins, acts against some order, and consequently that he must be put down and degraded from that order, which degradation is punishment."[2] Even in the domain of physical nature, it is a rule, "that whatever rises up against anything, suffers loss from the same;" or, to put the thought in more modern language, "action and reaction are equal."[3] And so there is a return, more or less violent, to the order which was disturbed. The same thing holds true in human affairs; for it is "in accordance with natural inclination, that every one tries to put down the man who rises up against him."[4] Nor is this always a sign of vindictiveness, but often a sign of just indignation against wrong-doers. Even when we are not personally concerned, we feel that a crime against public morality should be

[1] Suarez, "De Poen." Quest. LXXXV. Disp. VI. Sect. I.
[2] Sum. Theol., I. II. q. 87. art. 1.
[3] Rickaby, "Aquinas Ethicus," 1. c.
[4] Id. ibid.

punished according to the full rigor of the law, not merely in order to correct the offender and to deter others from imitating his example, but likewise in order "to right the wrong." There is such a thing as a righteous vengeance, an instinct that all sin must be expiated by suffering of one kind or another.

Hence it is not an unusual occurrence, that men, who are suddenly roused to a sense of their own baseness, injustice or ingratitude, are fired with a passion for self-inflicted pain. Have they blackened their neighbor's good name? They feel that they should make amends, even at the sacrifice of their own reputation. Have they injured him in his fortune? They feel that they should not merely restore what does not belong to them, but give liberally of their own to the needy. Have they exceeded the bounds of temperance and sobriety in eating and drinking? They feel that they should punish their over-indulgence by fasting and abstention. Conscience tells them, that to reestablish the moral equilibrium which they have disturbed, vindictive justice requires a reparation in kind, a returning of like for like, a retaliation upon themselves, a repression of illicit pleasure-seeking by an equivalent of suffering.

It is this principle which underlies the Levitical law of retaliation. — "He that giveth a blemish to any of his neighbors: as he hath done, so shall it be done to him. Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth

for tooth, shall he restore. What blemish he gave, the like shall he be compelled to suffer."[1] That law is, indeed, obsolete in the tribunals of earth, but not in those of heaven. For somehow, in one way or another, sooner or later, here or hereafter, the moral equilibrium disturbed by sin must be reestablished, the debt contracted with the divine justice must be paid in full. The Holy Ghost Himself says of the sinful soul, under the figure of Babylon: "As much as she hath lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give ye to her."[2]

Who, then, can think himself dispensed from practising mortification? Who can tell the full amount of harm done by his sins? Who can know to what extent he has interfered with the designs of God? Who can estimate the moral ruin which he has wrought in the universe? Who can foresee the ultimate effects of even one single sinful act? — of scandal given to Christ's little ones? of injury done to the reputation of our neighbor? of rebellion against lawful authority, whether lay or ecclesiastical? If it is true that every motion which we make, produces a physical effect which will be felt in the physical world unto the end of time, is it not also true that every sinful act which we do, produces a moral effect which will be felt in the moral world unto the end of time?

[1] Levit., XXIV. 19, 20.
[2] Apoc., XVIII. 7.

And, if so, shall we not do everything in our power, to counteract the evil?

It was considerations like these, that inspired the Saints with a holy hatred of themselves, and urged them to anticipate the justice of God by self-inflicted chastisements. Their sorrow for sin prompted them to take vengeance upon themselves; and so interior penance found its natural and fitting expression in exterior mortification.

But if mortification is necessary as an atonement for past sin, it is still more necessary as a preservative from future sin; because, even though we had fully expiated the sins which we have committed, we are never beyond the danger of falling into others.[1] By reason of the sin of our first parents, perhaps also by reason of the sins of more immediate ancestors, or by reason of our own past sins of habit, we all experience within us an inclination to evil. This inclination, more particularly when it is the consequence of our own faults, is commonly called vice. It is a moral disease which, like a burning fever, gradually consumes and wastes the strength and energy of the soul, and which will certainly end fatally, unless we apply the proper remedy. "Our fever," writes St. Ambrose, "is avarice; our fever is lust; our fever is excessive

[1] **"Spiritual Exercises."—Notes after Additions of the First Week.**

love of pleasure; our fever is ambition; our fever is anger."[1]

The only remedy is mortification. It is bitter to take, but it is efficacious; and its efficacy often lies in its very bitterness. Has any one inherited a strong inclination to the use of intoxicating drinks? Has he indulged it to excess and thus created a morbid craving? Has he become morally incapable of controlling himself, when he sees or tastes the tempting glass? It is plain, that he must mortify himself, and abstain even from what is perfectly innocent in itself and permissible to others. Has he by nature a tendency to violent likes or dislikes for others? Has he allowed his affections to get the better of his reason? Has the very presence of some persons become an occasion of sin to him? Again, it is plain, that he must mortify himself, and abstain even from what is perfectly innocent in itself and permissible to others. He must apply to himself the words of Christ: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee . . . . And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee."[2]

If the flesh itself is the direct source of our spiritual ailments, if it has rebelled or is rebelling against the behests of reason, we must punish it until it learns obedience. So did St. Paul who writes: "I chastise

[1] Hom., lib. IV. in cap. IV. ad fin.
[2] Matth., V. 29, 30.

my body, and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway."[1]

Some, it is true, have less need than others of corporal austerities; but, excepting the case, in which bodily infirmity in a manner replaces them, no one is wholly excused from practising them. The Church prescribes days of fast and abstinence, binding on all her children that are not lawfully exempted or dispensed. Besides these, there are many other ways of mortifying the flesh, adapted to each one's special needs; and some of them are often of the strictest obligation. They are suggested by natural reason itself to such as are striving to conform their lives to its dictates. Not only St. Paul but pagan philosophers, not only Christian ascetics but unbelieving men and women in all ages, when violently buffeted by the flesh, have instinctively resorted to self-inflicted bodily pain, as the only means of maintaining the supremacy of the spirit over matter and preserving themselves from falling to the level of the brute.

It is well to recall this to mind in our days, when even some of those who presume to guide others, are found to make light of bodily penances and perhaps to decry them as relics of barbarism. Say what they will, the corruptible body which men pamper and caress, is like a slave, often amenable to no rule but

[1] I. Cor., IX. 27.

that of the lash; and many of the temptations to which it gives rise, are very difficult to overcome, without the practice of corporal austerities.

It is true, nevertheless, that the mortification of the body is less important than the mortification of the passions. "There are two sorts of mortification and crucifixion," writes St. Augustin, "the one corporal, the other spiritual. The latter, which is the more valuable and excellent of the two, consists in restraining the emotions of the soul; in struggling daily against our vices; in conforming our conduct to the stern laws of virtue; briefly, in contending unceasingly with the old man within us. Whosoever does these things, makes a breach in the wall of passion and enters by violence into the kingdom of heaven."[1]

But all this is scarcely possible, without directing our attacks more or less against the flesh itself; because the passions, being radicated in the animal body, cannot be successfully combated, except through the body; so that almost every kind of mortification partakes somewhat of the nature of corporal penance. In other words, we must crucify the flesh, together with its vices and concupiscences. To mortify the desire of attracting attention to our conversation, we must bridle our tongues; to mortify curiosity, we must put a check upon our eyes, our ears, and our other bodily senses. Accordingly spiritual writers

[1] Serm. 20 de Sanctis.

distinguish a third kind of mortification, which they call mixed, because it is partly corporal and partly spiritual. It is ordinarily the most profitable, as well as the most practical, and may be taken as a fair criterion of one's sincerity and earnestness in the service of God, conformably to the words of St. Ignatius: "Let every one bring home to himself this truth, that he will advance just so much in the spiritual life, as he divests himself of the love of self and of personal comfort." [1]

Some pagan sages expressed the same thought, when they said that all philosophy may be summed up in the two words *bear* and *forbear*: bear with pain and suffering, forbear from pleasure and comfort; embrace those things which corrupt nature abhors, abstain from those towards which it is viciously inclined. And what they taught, not a few of them put in practice; for, convinced by experience that the wisdom, which they sought, "is not found in the land of them that live in delights," [2] they led a life of self-denial and mortification, which put to the blush many a professing Christian.

Others did as much for wordly glory and applause. They that, in the race-course, sought to be the first to touch the goal — so wrote the Latin poet — toiled and suffered much in youth; they put up with heat and

[1] "Reform of Life," after the Second Week of the Exercises.
[2] Job., XXVIII. 13.

cold, and shunned the pleasures of the palate and the flesh.[1] And St. Paul, pursuing the same idea, tells us: "Every one that striveth for the mastery, refraineth himself from all things."[2]

Many more endure the severest mortification for the sake of vanity, fashion, or the conventionalities of social life, often most unreasonable, and hurtful alike to soul and body. Hence, in a well-known mediæval legend, Lucifer is introduced, with telling effect, as looking down upon a city at night and saying: "I have more martyrs in your walls than God has; and they cannot sleep. They are my bondsmen and my thralls. Their wretched lives are full of pain, wild agonies of nerve and brain. And every heart-beat, every breath, is a convulsion worse than death."[3] And of Bl. Thomas More, England's martyred Chancellor, it is related that, when one day he detected his daughter putting herself to a veritable torture, through vanity in dress, he said to her: "My child, God would do you a real favor, to condemn you to hell, seeing you are at such pains to merit it."[4] A severe reproof on the lips of such a Saint

[1] "Multa tulit fecitque puer" etc.

[2] I Cor., IX. 25.

[3] "Golden Legend," translated by Longfellow.

[4] Another saying to the same effect, attributed to this Blessed Martyr, is: "So help me God, and none otherwise, but as I verily think a man buyeth hell with so much pain, that he might have heaven with less than the one half."

and such a father, but well deserved by many who, like the one addressed, make themselves martyrs of vanity, fashion and sin.

Why should we hesitate to do for supernatural motives, what they do for natural and perhaps sinful motives? Why should we find it hard to restrain ourselves, deny ourselves, mortify ourselves?

A life of mortification, courageously entered upon, is not a life of misery, but of happiness. For happiness in this world does not consist in avoiding all suffering, but in bearing it resolutely; not in having many comforts, but in enjoying them with moderation. Without suffering there is no life, either in the physical or moral order; because all life consists in action, in effort, in struggle, in conflict; and this implies a degree of suffering. Without suffering there is no development, no progress and, above all, no exercise of virtue; because all exercise consists in an exertion of strength; and this again implies a degree of suffering. But it is a suffering which produces health, and energy, and vigor, and happiness.

We may, therefore, conclude with the words of the IMITATION: "As long as suffering seems grievous to thee, and thou seekest to fly from it, so long will it be ill with thee, and the tribulation from which thou fliest will every where follow thee. When thou shalt have got so far, that tribulation is sweet and savory to thee for the love of Christ, then think that all is

well with thee; for thou hast found a paradise upon earth . . . . . Behold the cross is all, and in dying to thyself all consists; and there is no other way to life and to true internal peace, but the way of the holy cross and of daily mortification . . . . . Why then art thou afraid to take up thy cross, which leads to a kingdom? In the cross is salvation; in the cross is life; in the cross is protection from thy enemies. In the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the cross is strength of mind; in the cross is joy of spirit. In the cross is the height of virtue; in the cross is the perfection of sanctity. There is no health of the soul, nor hope of eternal life, but in the cross. Take up thy cross, therefore, and follow Jesus; and thou shalt go into life everlasting."[1]

[1] B. II. c. 12.

LESSON VII.

Mortification in practice. — Some easy kinds of mortification.

From the foregoing considerations it is clear, that mortification is absolutely necessary for all of us. It is inseparable from the practical profession of Christianity; because the practical profession of Christianity consists in the imitation of Christ, and that implies taking up our crosses and following Him to Calvary.

But the amount and kind of mortification, as well as the manner of performing it, depend largely upon the changing conditions of persons, times and places. No cast-iron rule, applicable to all, can be laid down. For mortification is not in itself an end, but a means to an end; and what is a means under some circumstances, may be an impediment under others.

In the first place, as to the amount of mortification: those who are physically strong and vigorous, and whose temptations have their origin in the flesh, may have to practice very rigorous bodily austerities, if they wish to preserve themselves from grievous faults and secure their eternal salvation. Yet all should avoid excesses, calculated to ruin the constitution or to bring on a notable infirmity.[1] For the

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," Tenth Addition.

body is a source of danger, both when it is too lusty and when it is too feeble. In the former case, it grows insolent; in the latter, it grows desperate. In the former case, we cannot carry it; in the latter, it cannot carry us.[1] The golden rule of moderation and discretion must be observed in this matter, as in everything else. "Whenever it is neglected, good is converted into evil, virtue into vice."[2]

There have been Saints, it is true, who practised the most appalling austerities, with a seeming disregard for the ordinary rules of human prudence. But some of them did so, under the special inspiration of divine grace; and, therefore, they cannot be proposed as models for general imitation. Others indulged those "holy follies," as St. Ignatius styles them, at the beginning of their conversion, when they thought them necessary to overcome their sinful inclinations, and little recked the consequences to the body, which they looked upon as their bitterest enemy. Their motive was, therefore, worthy of the highest admiration and praise. Nevertheless not a few — and among them St. Bernard — reproached themselves, in after life, for this early indiscretion, and lamented that, while they had only intended to

[1] St. Francis de Sales, "Introd. to a Devout Life," p. III. c. 23.

[2] St. Ign. Loyola, "Epist. de religios. perf. etc." "The maceration of the body by watchings and fastings, is not acceptable to God, except so far as it is a work of virtue; and

"crucify the old man," they had crucified the new man as well.

To guard against a similar mistake, a very enlightened and judicious ascetical writer warns us "to attend to the following recommendations: First, to limit our admiration of these holy excesses within certain bounds, lest they produce too strong an impression on the imagination, and neither to propose to imitate them, nor to look on them as an indispensable requisite to sanctity. Secondly, whether we embrace the practice of great corporal mortification or not, to attach ourselves principally to interior virtues, these being the essence of sanctity, and all the rest a mere appendage, which can be separated from the spirit without detriment. Thirdly, as far as the choice depends on ourselves, to prefer a common life, in order the more perfectly to imitate Jesus Christ, to preserve humility, to guard against pride, which loves singularity, and to render virtue attractive to our neighbor, instead of prejudicing him against it, by presenting it to his view incumbered with almost endless exterior practices." [1]

St. Francis de Sales adds that, if certain practices

that it is, in so far as it is done with due discretion, so that concupiscence may be restrained, at the same time that nature is not overwhelmed." — St. Thom. Sum. Theol., II. II. q. 88. art. 2 ad 3. — The translation of this passage is by Rev. Jos. Rickaby, "Aquinas Ethicus" in h. l.

[1] Grou, "The Interior of Jesus and Mary," vol. I. c. XXIX.

of voluntary mortification interfere with works of piety, zeal or charity, which we might undertake, it is altogether according to the mind of the Church, to omit those practices, and to engage in works which, besides subduing the flesh, produce other great spiritual advantages.[1]

As to the kind of mortification, which may or must be performed, the discipline of the Church and the practice of the faithful have gone through various phases, in different ages and countries. Yet spiritual writers are agreed in classing all kinds of bodily mortification under three general heads: fast and abstinence, vigils or holy watchings, and maceration or direct chastisement of the body.[2] All these have been consecrated and sanctified by our Divine Lord Himself.

Christ began his public life with a fast of forty days, during which he neither ate nor drank anything. Ages before, Moses kept a similar fast, when about to receive the tables of the law from the hands of God. Elias fasted, and David, and Josaphat, and Esdras, and the king of Nineveh. So likewise did Esther, and Judith, and the mother of Samuel. In a word, the most distinguished personages of the old covenant are represented to us in Holy Writ as fasting, when they wished to obtain some signal

[1] "Introd. to a Devout Life," as above.

[2] See St. Ignatius and St. Francis de Sales, as above.

favor from heaven, and especially when they desired to be delivered from sin or its consequences.

The penitential spirit shows itself almost instinctively in fasting and abstinence. For very many sins have their origin in the pleasures of the palate; and the most natural means of expiating, as well as preventing them, is a retrenchment of food and drink. "Restrain thy appetite, and thou wilt be better able to restrain all thy evil inclinations," writes à Kempis. Our Saviour Himself assures us, that certain kinds of devils must be cast out "by prayer and fasting."[1] And the Church, extolling the benefits of fasting, tells us that it serves "to repress vice, to raise the mind towards heaven, and to lay up treasures of virtue and merit."[2] What wonder, then, that she prescribes fast and abstinence at certain stated times during the year? By doing so, she points out to her children how they are to satisfy, at least in part, their obligation of doing penance.

In past ages, her laws in this respect were very rigid. Only one meal was allowed on fast-days, and that meal was not to be taken until towards sunset.[3] Even at that one meal, wine, as well as meat,[4] was forbidden during the whole of Lent; and meat in-

[1] Matth., XVII. 20.
[2] Preface for Lent.
[3] St. Augustin, "De mor. Eccl.," 33.
[4] St. Basil, Hom. Quadr.: St. Cyril Hierosolym. Cat. 4, et alii.

cluded eggs, milk, butter, and every kind of food derived from animals which have warm blood. So scrupulously was this custom observed, that, according to St. Chrysostom, a Christian would have preferred to die, rather than eat meat or drink wine on a fast-day. And when on one occasion, in time of drought and famine, the emperor Justinian wished to authorize the public sale of meat, the people refused to avail themselves of the opportunity offered them, in order not to depart from the custom, believed to have been instituted by the Apostles themselves.

This ancient discipline has been greatly mitigated. And yet so many try to evade even the milder prescriptions of the present, that it has been said sarcastically, "no one fasts now-a-days, except such as are not obliged to fast." Now, though there is no harm in seeking a dispensation from the law of fast and abstinence, when there is sufficient reason, yet the fervent Christian always does so with regret.[1]

[1] Many persons make altogether too light of the laws of fast and abstinence, and consider themselves excused for trivial reasons. Against this tendency St. Ignatius puts in a word of warning, where one would hardly expect it. After telling us that, while we are meditating on the glorious mysteries, such as the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord, we should avail ourselves even of the natural means at our disposal to rejoice with Him, such as flowers and sunlight, the fresh and quickening air of spring, he adds: "Instead of penance, we should be content with temperance and moderation of diet, *except in times of fasting and abstinence, appointed by the Church, whose precepts we must always*

His habitual disposition is, to increase rather than diminish the number of his fasts and abstinences, if he can do so without detriment to his health and his duties in life.

Listen to St. Francis de Sales, who is far from encouraging excessive bodily mortification, and bear in mind that he is not addressing himself to hermits or cloistered monks, but to persons living in the midst of the busy world. "If you are able to fast," he says, "it is well to do so on some days, in addition to those prescribed by the Church . . . . Even though these fasts be not very rigorous, the end will be attained; because the enemy is afraid of us, when he perceives that we know how to fast." [1]

After this general advice, which he explains at considerable length, the gentle Saint continues: "We ought, it seems to me, to have a special devotion to the words, 'eat such things as are set before you,' [2] spoken of old by our Blessed Saviour to his disciples. For to eat, without distinction, what is set before us, and in the order in which it is set before us, whether it is according to our taste or not, is, in my opinion, a mark of greater virtue, than always to select what is worst. For though the latter mode of life may seem more austere, the former implies a greater degree of

obey, unless there be a just impediment." Fourth Note, after the First Contemplation of the Fourth Week.

[1] "Introd. to a Devout Life", as above.

[2] Luke, X. 8.

resignation, since it requires us to submit not only our taste, but our choice as well, to that of others. And, of a truth, it argues no small degree of mortification, to adapt ourselves to the taste of others, and to accept with indifference whatever is set before us . . . . . In this indifference to what we eat and drink — always excepting, of course, what is injurious to our bodily or spiritual health — consists the perfect observance of the divine counsel, 'eat such things as are set before you'." [1]

If we have not yet attained this perfect indifference, we must at least "be on our guard," as St. Ignatius warns us, "that our mind be not completely engrossed in our food, and that we do not take it with avidity and haste, but, keeping our appetite under restraint, regulate both the measure of food and the manner of taking it." [2]

"Abstinence must be especially attended to," writes the Saint, "in the use of highly seasoned meats and delicacies, as they furnish greater occasion to the appetite to exceed, and to the enemy to tempt. Wherefore, to avoid excess, abstinence in respect to food may be practised in two ways: first, by accustoming oneself to eat coarser victuals; secondly, by taking delicacies in smaller quantities."

[1] As above.

[2] For this purpose, St. Ignatius recommends that, while eating, we think of our Divine Lord at table with his apostles, of the lives of the Saints, and other pious subjects. See "Spiritual Exercises," Rules for Regulating one's Food.

Precious and suggestive words! What is easier than to abstain at times from a particular kind of victuals, or to partake of them more sparingly than of others? It neither endangers our health nor attracts the notice of those who are with us at table. And yet it is a means of performing innumerable little acts of mortification at our meals. We all have our tastes, our likes and dislikes, in the matter of food and condiments. But why should we make them known, or always try to gratify them? Why be so nice and fastidious about what we eat? Why pick out what is best upon the board, the most toothsome slice of meat, the most savory plate of vegetables, the daintiest piece of tart, the choicest fruit upon the salver? Why not pass by a dish that looks particularly inviting, or dispense with a sauce or a relish that is quite unnecessary to stimulate a healthy appetite? Why eat outside of the regular meals? Why so often, at all hours and in all places? Behold here some of the many ways of mortifying ourselves, in the matter of food, with great benefit to both soul and body.

However, it is above all in regard to drink, as St. Ignatius reminds us, that we must learn to restrain ourselves. "And therefore each one must consider well, what is good for him, that he may allow it to himself, and what is hurtful, that he may abstain from it."[1] The same thing holds true, in general, of

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," as above.

stimulants and narcotics of every kind, especially of such as act powerfully upon the nervous system. They have their legitimate uses, no doubt, so long as they are taken with moderation, and leave a man perfect master of himself. They are not essentially bad, as some would have us believe; but they are very dangerous. When they are habitually used, they create an artificial need, which becomes stronger and more importunate by being satisfied. To all such things, therefore, even more than to food, we should apply the wise rule, laid down by St. Ignatius: "In order to avoid all excess, it is very useful . . . . . when one feels no desire of taking anything . . . . . to determine the quantity which it is well to take; and not to exceed that quantity, through any craving or temptation; but rather to diminish it, for the sake of overcoming every inordinate craving or temptation."[1] The very fact that one begins to experience a morbid inclination, which clamors for indulgence at stated hours, shows that it is high time for him to deny himself that indulgence, no matter how great his nervous irritability or prostration. Otherwise he will soon be the slave of a passion, far more troublesome than the evil from which he seeks relief.

The second kind of mortification, also consecrated by the example of our Divine Lord, consists in vigils or holy watchings. The Gospel records that, after a

[1] As above.

day spent in teaching the ignorant and healing the sick, "He passed the whole night in the prayer of God."[1] And, "the same night in which He was betrayed," He prepared Himself for his Passion by watching and praying, and asked his beloved disciples to "watch and pray" with Him. Taught by this example, the early Christians were in the habit of preparing in a similar manner for the great feasts of the year. After fasting on the eve, they spent the night, praying in the church. "Let us fast on Wednesday and Friday," said Pope St. Leo to the Roman people, "and on Saturday let us also keep watch at St. Peter's."[2]

For prudential reasons, such watches by the people at large were abolished by the Church, ages ago. Traces of the custom, however, remain in the midnight Mass before Christmas, and especially in the chanting of the divine office by different religious orders, at different hours of the night. Moreover, many holy persons, not bound to the public recitation of the divine office, often spend a portion of the night in private prayer. But this practice, though very laudable, must be imitated with much discretion, because a loss of the proper amount of sleep may entail the gravest consequences. "Every one," writes St. Francis de Sales, "should give as much of

[1] Luke, VI. 12.

[2] "Sabbato autem apud Beatum Petrum Apostolum pariter vigilemus." (Serm. 2 de jejun. dec. mens.)

the night to sleep, as his bodily constitution requires, in order to keep awake and labor profitably during the day."[1] And St. Ignatius says no less explicitly: "Nothing must be retrenched from the necessary sleep, except for a short time, in order to moderate the custom (if any one has it) of sleeping too much."[2]

But if there is danger in vigils prompted by an excess of mortification, there is far more danger in vigils due to a want of mortification. And the latter are unfortunately very common among all classes of society. Not only the numerous victims of fashionable dissipation, but many less worldly-minded persons keep the most unreasonable vigils, to the great detriment of both soul and body. Irregular in their habits, they do everything in a disorderly way. During the day they seem to have an abundance of leisure. At night they discover that they are behind in everything, and suddenly begin to display a prodigious amount of energy. They have important business on hand; they must finish it at once. They have heaps of urgent letters before them; they must answer them without delay. They light upon a book hitherto unopened by them; they must read it through at a sitting.

Thus they gradually contract the fatal habit of

[1] "Introd. to a Devout Life," III. 23.
[2] As above.

keeping late hours, and often do not retire to rest until it is nearly time to rise. And what is the consequence? That they are never fully asleep by night, nor fully awake by day; or that they are most awake, when they should be asleep, and most asleep, when they should be awake. The same indecision and want of self-control, which keeps them from going to bed, also keeps them from leaving it. And so they dream away the most precious hours of their lives. "There are some who are lost in their bed," said a great servant of God; "they are content to lie awake, that they may feel how comfortable they are. This is not like the Saints . . . . . Oh, how I love those little mortifications which are seen by no one, such as to rise a quarter of an hour earlier, or to rise for a few moments in the night for prayer!" [1]

St. Francis de Sales, always remarkable for his moderation, concludes this subject with the words: "In my opinion, those who aspire to a virtuous life, ought to make it a point to retire betimes at night, in order to be able to rise betimes in the morning." [2]

The third kind of mortification is maceration or direct chastisement of the body, by the infliction of positive pain upon the flesh. This, too, our Lord endured for our sake; because, at the time of his sacred Passion, He was bound, scourged, crowned

[1] "The Curé D'Ars," English Life, c. VI.

[2] As above.

with thorns, bruised, tortured in every limb of his body. And the Saints, uniting their sufferings to his, chastised their bodies, by means of disciplines, hair-cloths and other instruments of penance.

All these, used with due regard to each one's physical condition and duties in life, may be of the greatest spiritual profit. St. Francis de Sales, however, writing for devout persons in the world, recommends in an especial manner "the moderate use of the discipline which," he says, "is wonderfully efficacious in arousing the spirit of devotion."[1] St. Ignatius shows a similar preference. "In the matter of penance," he writes, "it seems to be expedient, that the pain should be felt in the flesh, without penetrating to the bones; so that pain, and not sickness, may be the result. For this reason, it appears preferable to discipline oneself with small cords, which hurt the outward parts, rather than in some other way, from which there may result a notable injury to the health."[2]

The object of these austerities is not to shed a profusion of blood which stains the garments, or to macerate the body until it looks like a skeleton, but to gain the mastery over the animal sense, by voluntarily bearing physical pain, and thus rising superior to the feeling of pleasure or comfort, which

[1] As above.
[2] "Spiritual Exercises," Tenth Addition.

makes so many persons "captives in the law of sin." Hence, if we are truly "zealous for the better gifts," we shall not be content with merely practising some bodily austerities at stated times, but shall seek our "greater mortification in all things." Like St. Francis Borgia, we shall find ways of leavening even our innocent amusements with a certain amount of penance; and, paradoxical as it may seem to the blind votaries of pleasure, we shall thereby make our enjoyments themselves more real and enduring. By degrees we shall acquire the habit of mortification, and come to experience a positive spiritual delight in thwarting "the reprobate sense" of the flesh.

We have been out, breathing the fresh evening air, and are rather tired from the exercise which we have taken. There is a cab or electric car in sight. It would be very comfortable to ride home, but quite as healthy to walk back. What shall we do? Prompted by our love of mortification, we shall decide to walk; and perhaps, if we are free to dispose of our money as we like, we shall give to the poor the fare which we have saved. — We are alone, or with a few friends in whose company we feel perfectly free. The weather is so dull and heavy, that it requires an effort to keep oneself erect. We are inclined to loll and lounge, and to seek our ease, as best we can. But, determined to vanquish ourselves, we shall be

upon our guard, and, from a motive of penance, shall be as self-restrained as in a drawing-room.[1]

Occasions like these are innumerable; and persons, in earnest about their spiritual welfare, are quick to discover them. Almighty God Himself provides many of them for us, and offers them, so to speak, ready-made and prepared for use. By a merciful dispensation of his providence, He mixes the bitter with the sweet, the disagreeable with the agreeable, to suit the special needs of our fallen nature.[2] Knowing how dangerous to us are the pleasures of sense, He supplies us with the antidote to the poison; it is for us to use it promptly. He sends us physical evils, for our spiritual good; it is for us to take advantage of the opportunity offered.

We are suffering from a slight indisposition, a head-ache or a tooth-ache. It is a trifling chastisement, indeed, for sinners like us. We know full well, that we deserve much more. Let us, then, accept it, in a penitential spirit, from the hands of our Heavenly Father. Instead of complaining and looking for commiseration, let us endure it in silence, and offer it up in atonement for our past self-indulgence.

[1] It is recorded of St. Francis de Sales, that he excelled in this sort of self-restraint.

[2] "Spiritual Exercises" of St. Ignatius — Father Roothaan's Notes on the Use of Creatures.

We have spent a restless night; and, as a natural consequence, we feel unusually nervous and irritable. What a precious occasion to practise mortification! Let us not fail to improve it. Let us not give way to our ill-humor, nor show it before others. On the contrary, let us consider it our duty to make ourselves particularly agreeable to those that approach us during the course of the day, and to receive them all the more cordially, because we feel inclined to repulse them.

We are so sorely pestered with flies and other insects, that we can scarcely get any rest, day or night. Another occasion of mortification, hailed with special delight by some of the Saints, who never tried to defend themselves against those little ministers of divine justice! If we have not the same degree of courage, let us at least refrain from grumbling, and bear with patience the annoyance which we cannot remove.

Things like these are a test of a man's virtue, because they are a test of his spirit of mortification, and a man's virtue is in proportion to his spirit of mortification.[1] For, in the last analysis, mortification is the supremacy of mind over matter, the triumph of the spirit over the flesh; and this triumph, to be complete, necessarily requires the possession of a high degree

[1] Mortification was the standard, by which St. Ignatius judged of a man's spiritual progress.

of virtue. "They that are according to the flesh," says the Apostle, "mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the spirit, mind the things that are of the spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death, but the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace . . . . Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For, if you live according to the flesh, you shall die. But if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live. For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."[1]

[1] Rom. VIII. 5 et seqq.

LESSON VIII.

The subduing of pride — Humility the foundation of the spiritual edifice — Its nature.

As Christ, our Lord, has taught us to subdue our sensuality, so also has He taught us, in a particular manner, to subdue our pride.

Wishing to be like unto God, man proclaimed himself his own master; making Himself like unto man, God "took the form of a servant."[1] The creature could not, by its own power, rise up to the Creator; and therefore the Creator stooped down to the creature, to lift it up to Himself. Here we have a powerful motive, so far as human reason may dare assign motives, for the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation. O, the depth of the wisdom and the condescension of God! He appears among us in such a form, that the endeavor to be like Him is not a sin, but a virtue, not a certain cause of perdition, but an essential condition of salvation. "For, whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be made conformable to the image of his Son."[2]

And wherein are they to be made conformable? Listen to the Incarnate Word Himself: "Learn of

[1] Phil. II. 7.
[2] Rom. VIII. 29.

me," He says, "because I am meek and humble of heart."[1] That is, according to the commentary of St. Augustin, "Learn of me, not to plan the fabric of the universe, not to call into being the visible and invisible creation, not to raise the dead to life or to perform other prodigies: no, but learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart."[2]

The lesson is as difficult, as it is necessary, for fallen man. No one but a divine Master could have made it fully intelligible. The pagan sages did not attempt to teach it to their disciples: in fact, they themselves had no clear conception of humility, in the Christian sense. They had, indeed, the word "humble" in their vocabulary. But it meant "lowly, mean, base, groveling, crouching upon the ground." It denoted the abject condition of the servant, of the menial, of the slave. And such, in truth, is the position which man naturally holds in respect to God. "O Lord!" exclaims the Royal Prophet, "O Lord! for I am thy servant; I am thy servant and the son of thy handmaid."[3]

But the state of servitude does not, of itself, constitute the virtue of humility; because it is not a matter of choice with us. The virtue consists in cheerfully accepting our lot and acquiescing in it.

[1] Matth. XI. 29.
[2] Serm. 10 de Verb. Dom.
[3] Psalm CXV. 16.

Hence, humility may be defined: The voluntary acknowledgment of our lowliness, flowing from a deep sense of our utter dependence upon God.[1]

What more natural than this sense of dependence? Surely, we know full well that all we have and hope to have, is from God. It is a truth too simple to need proof. We cannot, therefore, attribute anything to ourselves, without going against our own reason. Yet this is what many of us are doing every day of our lives.

Some there are, writes St. Francis de Sales, who glory in the antiquity of their family, in its alliance with the noblest houses of the world, and in the public esteem which it enjoys. But in this they are undoubtedly guilty of great folly; because all such things, so far as they are of any value, are not due to those who now boast of them, but rather to their ancestors who are no more. Others pride themselves on the horses which they ride, the feathers which they carry in their hats, or the coats which they wear. Do they not see, that in all these cases the merit, if merit there be, belongs not to themselves, but to the horses on which they are seated, the birds from which the feathers were plucked, and the tailors by whom the coats were made? Others, again, plume themselves on their personal appearance, their well-trimmed beards, their frizzled hair, their soft and dainty

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. II. II. q. 161. art. 1. 2. 6.

fingers, or, perhaps, on their skill in playing, singing and dancing. Really, one must be very childish or very silly, to stake his reputation on such trifling advantages and frivolous accomplishments![1] In this humorous vein the holy Bishop of Geneva goes on, turning into ridicule the ordinary subjects of vain glory.

But even if the advantages which we enjoy over others, are great and real, it will always be true, that they are from God, and not from ourselves. For, "what hast thou," asks the Apostle, "that thou hast not received? and, if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"[2] Whatever we have belongs to God. He allows us the use of it; the ownership He reserves to Himself. We hold it in trust and not in fee-simple. The greater the trust, the greater also is our responsibility. "The Gospel warns us to beware," writes St. Gregory, "lest we who seem to have been more highly favored than others by the heavenly master, should in consequence be more severely judged; because the account to be rendered, increases in proportion to the gifts that have been conferred on us. Wherefore, the more we have been entrusted with, the more reason have we to humble ourselves in God's sight and to be faithful in his service."[3] This is only expressing in other

[1] "Introd. to a Devout Life," part III. c. 4.
[2] I. Cor. IV. 7.
[3] Hom. 9 in Evang.

words what our Lord Himself teaches us, when He says: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more." [1]

Have we an abundance of wordly goods? Then have we a most weighty and responsible duty to perform. For we are God's agents, charged to administer his estate according to his orders. "Mine is the silver and mine is the gold, saith the Lord of hosts." [2] The day will come, and it is not far off, when He will demand a rigorous account of every farthing which we have expended.

Are we possessed of superior mental abilities and knowledge? They are the talents which the heavenly master has delivered to us, that we may trade with them and thus be able, when He comes, to return Him his own with interest. Woe is us, if we squander them or, like the servant in the Gospel parable, bury them in the earth! For, on the day of reckoning, we shall hear the terrible words: "The unprofitable servant cast ye into exterior darkness." [3]

Do we hold positions of honor and authority? We are stewards, set over the household of God. We have in our keeping the temporal and eternal welfare of human beings, whom He loves as the apple of his eye. If, false to our trust, we allow any of them to

[1] Luke XII. 48.
[2] Agg. II. 9.
[3] Matth. XXV. 30.

perish or to suffer, He may suddenly say to us: "Give an account of your stewardship, for you can be stewards no longer."[1]

Have we enjoyed the incomparable blessings of a virtuous Christian home, in which our childhood was so carefully screened from spiritual harm, that we knew not evil? It is no merit of ours, no pledge of perseverance. Had we been exposed to the same temptations as many others, upon whom we are accustomed to look down with pharisaical disdain, we should in all probability be far worse than they are. All glory, then, to Him who, knowing our weakness, "protected us in the shadow of his hands and sheltered us under the covert of his wings;"[2] to us nothing but the shame and confusion of being so irresponsive to his watchful love.

Have we had exceptional facilities to practice our religion, and to be faithful to our Christian duties? It is God who provided us with those facilities, who disposed sweetly the course of our lives, and prevented us the while with his holy inspirations, inviting, soliciting, urging us, and almost using a holy violence to draw us and keep us near to Himself. Assuredly, we have reason to cry out with the Psalmist: "He hath not done in like manner to every nation; and his judgments He hath not made manifest to them."[3] Should

[1] Luke XVI. 2.
[2] Psalm LX. and Isaias LI.
[3] Psalm CXLVII. 20.

He find that we do not take full advantage of the rare opportunities offered us, we have reason to fear that He will pronounce against us the sentence which He pronounced of old against his chosen people: "Therefore I say to you, that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and shall be given to a nation yielding the fruits thereof." [1]

Supposing, then, that we had never swerved from the ways of righteousness, nor abused the gifts of God, what reason should we have to glory? Does not our Lord tell us, "when you have done all things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants, we have done what we ought to do?" [2] Was it not our duty to serve God, with all the powers of our soul and all the senses of our body? And was it not God who enabled us to do so?

Without his aid, in the natural order, we cannot so much as draw a breath or move a finger. Without his grace, in the supernatural order, we cannot so much as pronounce the holy name of Jesus unto salvation. So that, as St. Augustin teaches, when God rewards our good deeds, He only crowns his own gifts. We can destroy ourselves, but we cannot save ourselves. "Destruction is thy own, O Israel," says the Almighty by the mouth of the prophet Osee, "thy hope is only in me." [3] And Jeremias exclaims: "The

[1] Matth. XXI. 43.
[2] Luke XVII. 10.
[3] Osee, XIII. 9.

mercies of the Lord that we were not consumed; because his tender mercies have not failed."[1]

And how have we corresponded with His mercies? How have we profited by the profusion of graces with which He has deluged our souls? Ah, how fearful the disproportion between the helps which we have received, and the use which we have made of them! How lavish, how incessant the outlay! How scanty, how fitful the return! No one, surely, can look back upon the past, without being appalled at this contrast and finding new food for humility in the barrenness of his life.

Nor is this the worst. Not only have we failed to improve the opportunities offered, but we have actually trampled God's graces under foot. We have revolted against Him, time and again. We have multiplied our treasons, writes a well known spiritual author; we have not broken one, but numerous laws, as if to show that it was not the hardness of any particular precept, so much as the simple fact of being under God's yoke at all, which we found intolerable. Now, all this affects our actual condition, even though we be at present living lives of great sanctity and perfection. "A pardoned criminal to his last day will not cast the inferiority which he has brought upon himself. No pardon, no honors, can ever cover the fact either from others or himself. Nay, so

[1] Lam. III. 22.

far as he himself is concerned, they will only keep the fact bright and burnished in his mind . . . . So, surely, it is with us men. If looked at without advertence to the original fall, or to our own fall, or to our renewed falls after grace given, what are we but finite, dependent, imperfect? But, when those three additional facts of our history are added to our condition, how much more narrow and little, dependent and inferior, do we appear to become! The least word seems too big to express our littleness. But we can go lower still. Pardon lowers us. The abundance and frequency of mercy humbles us. The goodness of God gives a new life to the sense of our own misery and hatefulness. It quickens our knowledge of our own inferiority into a positive feeling of self-contempt."[1]

Moreover, though, relying upon God's mercy and forgiveness, we have reason to believe that at present we are well with Him, though like the Apostle we are not conscious to ourselves of anything, we are not thereby justified;[2] for, in the sight of God, "no man living shall be justified."[3] Our very best actions are often so marred by imperfections, carelessness and negligence, that ascetical writers compare them to a precious cloth, so badly stained and soiled that it has lost most of its value. Did we see them, as they

[1] Faber, "Creator and Creature," B. I. c. II. page 53.
[2] I. Cor. IV. 4.
[3] Psalm CXLII. 2.

really appear to the eyes of God, we should blush to present ourselves with them before Him, and should cry out with St. Peter: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."[1]

"When we do really great things," writes the author quoted above, "we fail in some little point of them. There is a flaw of meanness running across our generosity, and debasing every one of its products . . . . . With ourselves, what is self-deceit but meanness? What is slavery to bodily comforts, what greediness at meals, what rudeness in manners, what personal vanity, what a hundred idle extravagances of self-praise in which we daily indulge, what the inexhaustible pettiness of wounded feeling, but meanness, downright meanness? In our intercourse with others, what is lying, but meanness? What are pretence, selfishness, irritability, and more than half the world's conventions, but meanness, systematized meanness? In our relations with God, what are lukewarmness and hyprocrisy and self-righteousness but meanness? What is venial sin, but miserable meanness? Many a man, who has found it hard to hate himself, when he looked only at his sins, has found the task much easier, when he had the courage to hold close to his eyes for a good while the faithful picture of his incredible meanness. O what a piercing, penetrating vision it is, running all through us with

[1] Luke V. 8.

a cold sharpness, when grace lets us see how low and vile, how base and loathsome, how little and how sneaking — forgive the word, we cannot find another — we are in everything. Everybody seems so good, except ourselves; and we, O, so intolerably hateful, so ugly, so repulsive, such a burden to ourselves.'' [1]

Clearly, a proper estimate of ourselves is necessarily a low estimate. Hence St. Bernard rightly defines humility, as ''a virtue which, giving a man a correct knowledge of self, makes him appear despicable in his own eyes.'' No wonder, then, that the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas, did not understand, how any one could be proud. No wonder, that some other Saints affirmed, that there was no vice which they dreaded less than pride. They knew themselves; and to know themselves, was sufficient to drive far from them all thoughts of self-esteem. In their own hearts, they sincerely considered themselves inferior to every one else; because they were keenly alive to the countless favors conferred upon them, and to their own want of fidelity, whereas they did not know nor presume to know the amount of grace vouchsafed their neighbor, or his correspondence therewith. They felt too useless and too sinful, to usurp God's prerogative by sitting in judgment upon others. They practised what our Lord recommends to his disciple, in these words of the IMITATION OF

[1] Faber, ''Creator and Creature,'' B. II. c. II. page 163.

CHRIST: "Think of thy sins with great compunction and sorrow, and never esteem thyself to be anything for thy good works. Thou art indeed a sinner, subject to and entangled with many passions. Of thyself thou always tendest to nothing; thou easily fallest; thou art quickly overcome, disturbed and undone. Thou hast not anything in which thou canst glory, but many things for which thou oughtest to humble thyself."[1]

Whosoever has learned this lesson, has entered upon the path of holiness; because, as St. Thomas teaches, the first step towards holiness consists in removing obstacles. This humility does by expelling pride, which is the chiefest obstacle to salvation, and in this sense it is called the foundation of the spiritual edifice.[2] "Do away with humility," writes St. Bernard, "and all the virtues will be nothing but a heap of ruins."[3] And St. Augustin asks: "Dost thou wish to be great? Begin with what is least. Dost thou think of putting up a spiritual building of great height? Think first of laying a deep and solid foundation of humility. For, the higher the edifice which one proposes to erect and the heavier the superstructure is to be, the deeper also does he sink the foundation. When he is building, he gradually rises higher and higher; but so long as he is digging the

[1] B. III. c. 4, no. 2 and foll.
[2] Sum. Theol. II. II. q. 161. art. 5.
[3] Epist. 41.

foundation, he goes down lower and lower. Therefore, it is necessary to descend into the earth, before the edifice can tower aloft into the sky. And how high up is our spiritual edifice to reach? I will tell you at once: Up to the vision of God. Think what an elevation is necessary, to enjoy the vision of the Most High. He that desires it, understands me. We shall be raised to the vision of the one true and sovereign God, and in that vision we shall find the source of our blessedness."[1]

[1] Serm. 10 De Verbo Dom.

LESSON IX.

False notions of humility — Genuine humility not opposed to truth, greatness, strength, magnanimity, courage.

So sweet and lovely is the virtue of humility, that it drew the Almighty from his throne in heaven to the lowly cottage of Nazareth. According to all seeming, therefore, it should win its way into the affection of men, as well.

And yet, strange as it may appear, there are those — nor are they few or obscure — who would fain exclude it, not only from their hearts, but even from the category of the virtues; who tell us, that "all the virtues are summed up in self-trust;" [1] nay, who are not ashamed to assert, that our dignity and our manhood require us to be absolutely self-sustained, and to acknowledge no other law or authority, save that of our nature.

Catholics, it is plain, would not dare use such language; because they recognize in it an echo of the words, addressed by the tempter to our first parents in the garden. But, if they manifest no positive aversion to humility, do they all appreciate, at its full value, this favorite virtue of the Incarnate Word and of his

[1] Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Blessed Mother? Or do they perhaps feel shy of it? Do they look upon it, almost unconsciously, as suited to the past rather than to the present? to ages of darkness rather than to ages of light? to children rather than to those who have come to man's estate? to others, in a word, rather than to themselves?

It would almost seem so. They do not, of course, tell us this in explicit terms. But their actions speak for them more distinctly than their lips could do. The Gospel maxims and ascetical writings, which commend the virtue of humility, are to them like a foreign language, whose sounds are unfamiliar to their ears. And yet they will not deign to employ an interpreter, or admit of his services, when he offers them. In fact, if a spiritual director ventures to insist much upon the subject, they forthwith conceive a feeling of distrust towards him; and, though they may not be willing to admit it, his arguments only serve to confirm them in their prejudices.

For one cause or another, many have come to believe that humility makes us unnatural and gloomy, weak and cowardly: compelling us to shut our eyes to the good that is in us, in order to gaze exclusively upon the dark and dismal picture of our utter worthlessness, to stifle the loftiest aspirations of our nature, and to crouch in abject servility at the feet of our fellow-men. Is it any wonder, then, that they should shrink from the practice of humility?

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The picture which they draw for themselves of this amiable virtue is a caricature; and a caricature converts even the most beautiful forms into monsters. It is not a likeness, because it exaggerates and overcharges. It is designed to discredit and turn into ridicule.

No! humility does not make us unnatural, nor does it compel us to shut our eyes to the good that is in us. On the contrary, provided we do not claim as our own what is God's, we do well to dwell in loving meditation upon all the good that we have, both in the natural and in the supernatural order. It will be an incentive, not to pride but to gratitude. A careful distinction between what we are with God and what we are without Him, will soon convince us, that what we are with Him is not from ourselves but from Him. Whatever is from Him, the bodies which He fashioned out of the clay of the earth, the souls which He breathed into us, the mysterious participation of the divine Nature, received at the regenerating font of Baptism, the supernatural aids of grace, by means of which we are enabled to perform actions, meritorious of eternal rewards: all this is something great, and makes us truly great, very great. We should ponder it well and often; we should feel exceedingly happy in the possession thereof; but we should not fail to give the glory to Him from whom it all comes.[1]

[1] St. Teresa, Autobiography, X.

Thus did the Blessed Virgin Mary, the most richly endowed and yet the humblest of all pure creatures. She recalled, and valued as they deserved, each and every one of the heavenly favors conferred upon her: that stupendous dignity of her Divine Maternity; that singular prerogative of her Immaculate Conception; that freedom from personal sin; that happy immunity from concupiscence; that continual stream of incomparable graces, poured into her soul in such profusion, that St. Jerome says, "to others a limited share of grace was imparted, on Mary was showered the fulness of grace which is in Christ." At the thought of all these favors, she overflowed with joy; and, because she was unable to contain it within her bosom, she hastened to share it with her holy kinswoman, St. Elizabeth. But the outpourings of her joy, instead of endangering or impairing her humility, confirmed and enhanced it. Far from being elated, she wondered, how the Almighty could have deigned to take notice of her, and single her out among the daughters of Eve. "My soul doth magnify the Lord," she sang, "and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me: and holy is his name."[1]

[1] **Luke, I. 46 and foll.**

If we meditate in a similar spirit upon God's countless mercies to us, we too shall overflow with gratitude and spiritual gladness. But, far from nursing thoughts of self-complacency, we shall be overwhelmed with astonishment at the unmerited bounty of God, and shall exclaim in the words of Holy Writ: O Lord, "what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?"[1]

It is true, nevertheless, that we may be guilty of vain glory in recalling or rehearsing the gifts of God. Everything depends upon the motive which prompts us.

There are some who rehearse what they possess, or fancy themselves to possess, in words expressive of gratitude to God. But their tone and manner leave no doubt, that their aim is to attract attention to themselves. They wish to be considered as highly favored, and very humble, at the same time. Their reference to the Almighty savors of the Pharisee, who thanked the Lord that he was "not like the rest of men."

There are others who are forever making a public confession of their general unworthiness, and of their want of correspondence with the many signal graces bestowed on them. They are great sinners, they tell us; they are the scum of the earth; they are the outcasts of the world. But they would be grievously offended,

[1] Psalm VIII. 5.

if they were taken at their word. They do not expect to be believed but contradicted, in order that they may enjoy the delicious sensation of listening to the recital of their excellences; for praise is sweet music to their souls. They feign to flee from honors, in order that the world may run after them and constrain them to accept them. They make a show of looking for the last place, in order that they may be pressed to take the first.

Nothing could be more foreign to humility than such conduct. For humility is truth, and therefore an enemy of artifice and disguise. As it prevents us from boasting of our good deeds and merits, so it guards us against exaggerating our failings and shortcomings. As it teaches us to shun all unnecessary allusions to self, so it prompts us, when duty demands, to speak out our full mind, regardless alike of the smiles and of the frowns of the world. The humble man, observes St. Francis de Sales, makes no parade of his humility; nay, rather, so far as in him lies, he seeks to conceal his humility, as well as his other virtues.[1] Let this, then, be your unvarying rule: Do not say what tends to humble you, unless you wish your hearers to believe you; do not lower your eyes, unless you also lower yourself in your own

[1] So did St. Ignatius. See Bartoli's Life of the Saint, after the vision in which the Saint was proposed to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi as the master of humility.

esteem; do not take the last place, unless you are willing to keep it.[1]

A golden rule, indeed, which furnishes us an infallible test of our sincerity! For, if we do not mean what our words and actions imply, we are liable to draw upon ourselves shame and confusion, instead of honor and distinction. And this alone suffices to show that our humility is not genuine; because the shame and confusion which we experience, are the effect of disappointed ambition. It is pride, disguised as humility, that makes us unhappy, when we consider ourselves slighted. As a matter of fact, the slaves of pride are never really happy; they lack an essential element of happiness, which consists in the interior peace of mind.

Take as an example the fashionable lady, whose one aim in life is to shine in social circles; to make an ostentatious display of her costly silks and satins, of her sparkling jewels and still more sparkling conversations; to be the centre of attraction, the observed of all observers; and thus to arouse the jealousy, if not the admiration, of her rivals. What arts and intrigues she resorts to, what worry and feverish excitement she goes through, in order to achieve a passing triumph! And if she is outdone by others, what melancholy takes possession of her soul! What sad recollections embitter her existence! What hys-

[1] Introd. to a Devout Life, P. III. c. 5.

terical tears and convulsions often follow! What heartburnings and headaches! What gloomy days and sleepless nights!

Or take the man who lives for fame; who finds his greatest delight in being forever before the public, and hearing the rabble shout itself hoarse over his platitudes about liberty, philanthropy, patriotism and kindred subjects; who hopes, in this manner, to ride upon the tide of popular approval, into prominence and power. If he fails to reach the goal of his ambition or falls from favor, how wretched, how unbearable his life becomes! How often it ends in debauchery, insanity, suicide!

The mental agony which such a man endures, is vividly portrayed in the Book of Esther, where the sudden fall of Aman is recorded. When that haughty courtier had seemingly attained the highest pinnacle of glory, he called together his friends, and declared to them the greatness of his riches and the dignity to which his sovereign had advanced him. Then giving free vent to the gall which filled his soul, because there was one man who did not bend the knee to do him homage, he added: "And whereas I have all these things, I think I have nothing, so long as I see Mardochai the Jew sitting before the king's gate."[1] Here is a story of self-inflicted misery, which, with slight modifications, is repeating itself every day.

[1] Esther V. 13.

But if we look for a pen-picture of pride, as well as of humility, we shall find it in that inspired meditation on "The Two Standards," wherein St. Ignatius sketches, with a few bold strokes, the character of satan and of our Divine Redeemer. The former is the impersonation of pride, the latter of humility.

Satan is unfurling his banner on the plains of Babylon; he is seated on a high throne of fire; his countenance is writhing with rage and agony.—The high throne and the attitude of the demon betoken pride; the rage and agony written upon his features are a sign of passion which, restless and burning as fire, agitates and tortures the proud; Babylon, which means "confusion," represents the turmoil and excitement amid which they are always living. Go whithersoever they will, they cannot escape from their torments; for the cause of them is within themselves.

Our Divine Redeemer, on the other hand, is erecting his banner upon the plains of Jerusalem; He is standing in a lowly place among his followers; his face is wearing a mild and winning expression. — The lowly place and the posture of our Lord denote humility; his mild and winning mien indicates the sweet contentment that dwells in the souls of the humble; Jerusalem, which signifies "Vision of Peace," is a symbol of the peace that compasses them about. They experience the truth of our Saviour's promise,

"Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart . . . . and you shall find rest for your souls."[1]

How groundless, then, is the assertion sometimes heard, that humility makes us gloomy, because it holds up to our gaze nothing but the dark and dismal picture of our utter worthlessness! Just the reverse is true. The humble have within them the secret of happiness, aye the very fountain of happiness. Even their own nothingness becomes dear to them, when they think of Him who drew them out of it and who keeps them from falling back into it.

St. Francis Borgia, the saint of humility, spent three hours daily in the absorbing and undistracted meditation of his own nothingness. St. Francis of Assisi, when at the very culminating point of his contemplation, exclaimed: "Who art Thou, my Lord, and who am I? Thou art an abyss of essence, truth and glory; and I am an abyss of nothingness, vanity and miseries." The B. Angela of Foligno cried out in a loud voice: "O unknown nothingness! O unknown nothingness! I tell you with full certainty, that the soul can have no better knowledge than that of its own nothingness." Our Divine Lord Himself said to St. Catherine of Sienna: "Knowest thou, my daughter, who I am and who thou art? I am who am, and thou art that which is not. By this knowledge thou shalt obtain blessedness."[2]

[1] Matth. XI. 29.

[2] Faber, "Creator and Creature," B. II. c. II. page 100.

It is indeed a blessed thing to realize that, being so little, we are completely dependent on a God of infinite power and infinite love. It is a delightful thing to feel that, being so weak, we may flee to Him and lean upon his bosom, as a child flees to its mother and leans upon her bosom. Well, then, this is precisely what humility teaches us; for, after all, it is nothing but the practical acknowledgment of our utter dependence upon God. It is the greatness of our littleness, the strength of our weakness.

What is greater, what could be greater, after God, than the Sacred Humanity of our Divine Lord? And yet what is, or could be, more dependent upon God? Though a complete substance, the human nature of Christ exists, nevertheless, after the manner of a part, in the Person of the Eternal Word, who assumed it and united it in an ineffable manner to Himself. In other words, the Sacred Humanity has not, like every other individual human nature, a distinct human personality of its own. The hypostatic union — that is, the union of Christ's human nature with the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity — absolutely excludes a human personality. Now, it is a man's human personality which constitutes him, in a true sense, an independent human individual and makes him master of his own actions. The Sacred Humanity, therefore, having no human personality, is not thus independent nor master of its own actions. On the contrary, it is

absolutely dependent upon the Divine Person of the Eternal Word, to whom its actions are referred. When Christ grieves, weeps, suffers and dies, no less than when he walks upon the waters, calms the raging sea, multiplies the loaves, restores the dead to life and rises by his own power from the tomb, it is always the same Divine Person that performs the actions and gives them their infinite value and efficacy.[1] With reason, then, did our Lord, as man, propose Himself as the model of humility, saying: "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart."

After this, it is scarcely worth while to notice the imputation, that humility, by compelling us to stifle the loftiest aspirations of our nature, makes us weak and pusillanimous.[2] For it must be evident that as dependence upon God makes us morally great, so it also makes us morally strong and magnanimous. Mistrust of self and trust in God are like the two scales of a balance; as one ascends, the other descends. Wherefore, the less the humble man relies upon his own strength, the more he relies upon the omnipotence of God, saying with the Apostle, "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me."[3]

It argues no lack of humility, then, to foster great and noble sentiments or to aspire to an exalted degree of holiness. Our Lord Himself invites us to do so;

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. I. q, 28.
[2] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. II. II. q. 129.
[3] Phil. IV. 13.

because He says to all, "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." To refuse this invitation, writes St. Francis de Sales, is to imitate king Achaz, who, when bidden in the name of God to ask for a sign of divine power, replied: "I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord."[1] Mark the hypocrisy of the man! Under the mask of humility, he rejects the favor which the Almighty wishes to do him. Does he not see, that, as it is pride to resist the divine will, so it is humility to comply with it?

Well, then, the divine will in our regard is, that we should aim at the highest Christian perfection. Away, therefore, with such subterfuges as these: "I refrain from frequenting the sacraments, because I feel my unworthiness; I fear to be thought pious, because considering my frailty, I am convinced that I should bring discredit upon religion." Such language, St. Francis de Sales assures us, is dictated by a subtle self-love, masquerading as humility, in order the better to palliate its own tepidity, and to censure with less remorse the ways of God and of his Saints.[2]

It argues no lack of humility, either, to engage in great and arduous undertakings for the divine glory. Nay, rather, without humility it is impossible to endure prolonged and generous labors in the service of God, because it is impossible to face the contra-

[1] Isaias VII. 12.

[2] "Introd. to a Devout Life." Part III. c. 5.

dictions and persecutions which are inevitable. The proud man begins and ends with self. All his energy is directed towards personal aggrandizement. His only idea of success is, to lead and to dictate; to show head and shoulders above his fellow-men, even though he must mount upon the ruins of his religion; to be honored with ostentatious titles, even though he must purchase them at the sacrifice of conscience; to draw attention to himself, even though he must undo what has been well done by others; to pull down, if he cannot build up; to mar, if he cannot improve. Like the knights of olden times, he always carries his cognizance upon his breast; like the Pharisees, he does his works before men, in order that he may be seen and applauded by them.

The humble man, on the contrary, forgets his own worldly interests, in order that he may devote himself to the interests of God. And thus he becomes capable of the sublimest aspirations, of the most heroic sacrifices, of the most unselfish charity. He is superior to human respect and to the varying opinions of the hour. Far from being cowardly, or crouching in abject servility at the feet of his fellow-men, he says to them with the Apostle of the Gentiles: "To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you or by man's day."[1] He may be despised and made the laughing stock of the world. But what is that to Him, so long

[1] I. Cor. IV. 3.

as he has God for his witness and his judge? He may be threatened with exile, imprisonment and death. What matters it? True he is weak, but God is strong; and God is with him, to strengthen his weakness.

What more generous and magnanimous than these and similar sentiments, which arise spontaneously in the humble soul? What more modest, and yet more intrepid, than the language and demeanor of the virgin martyr St. Agatha, who thus replied to the tyrant's interrogatory: "Yes, I come of a noble line, as all my family records attest. But the highest nobility consists in the service of Christ. I am the handmaid of Christ, and therefore I appear in this humble guise. Strengthened by Him, I will persevere in the confession of his holy name. If thou cast me to the beasts, they will become tame on hearing the name of Jesus. If thou throw me into the flames, the Angels will pour down a refreshing dew." So saying, the martyr went rejoicing to her prison, and recommended her struggle to the Lord.[1]— What more courageous than the defiance flung at the pagan persecutor by the young deacon St. Lawrence: "I worship the God of heaven and earth, and Him alone do I serve; and, therefore, I fear not thy torments."[2]

Here is the secret of the heroism displayed by the martyrs: profound humility and sublime fortitude;

[1] Roman Breviary, Feast of St. Agatha.
[2] Id., Feast of St. Lawrence, Martyr.

utter diffidence of self and unbounded confidence in God, who "hath showed might in his arm."

Their humility gave them a right to count upon the special help of God. "For the Lord is high and looks on the low; and the high he beholds afar off."[1] The simple He regards with complacency; and the arrogant He abominates.[2] He exalts the humble; and scatters the proud in the conceit of their heart.[3] He gives his grace to the humble; and resists the proud.[4] "Terrible words," said a learned and pious American Bishop, now gone to his reward, "terrible words and quite enough to make a person tremble: God resists the proud!" Think what that means. Without God's constant assistance we are undone: and the proud, instead of having God's assistance, are threatened with his resistance.

And why this resistance to the proud? The Almighty Himself makes answer, when He says: "I will not give my glory to another."[5] The proud endeavor to rob God of his glory; because they put themselves into his place, and refer everything to themselves as to its centre.

Now, if we are ever so little observant, we cannot fail to notice that this is peculiarly the tendency of

[1] Ps. CXXXVII. 6.
[2] Prov. XVI. 5.
[3] Luke I. 51. 52.
[4] I. Peter V. 5.
[5] Isaias XLII. 8.

our age. Not that men deny the existence of God, though infidelity is unfortunately common enough, but that they are reluctant to acknowledge his supreme dominion over the works of his hands. They are the proprietors of the world, not tenants in it, and tenants at will; they are their own masters; they are complete in themselves. They simply count out the Almighty; or, at best, they treat Him as one party to a contract of which they make the conditions. Their conduct is only a new phase of a very old sin, as old almost as the human race itself. The evil is rapidly spreading among those who are strangers to the faith. But if it affected them only, we should have little reason for alarm. Unfortunately this is not the case. The epidemics of the world corrupt the air, and a milder form of the pestilence makes its appearance quite naturally among the faithful. Thus it comes to pass that, now as always, there are among Catholics indubitable traces of an attitude towards God, caught from the prevailing fashion of the world.[1]

Hence the unmistakable repugnance of many to the virtue of humility; hence also the special need of cultivating it. For, in the words of St. Gregory, "when our Lord and Saviour, the new Adam, came into the world, He laid down a new code of laws for the world. To correct our vicious inclinations, He gave us a plan of life which is, in every respect, the very

[1] Faber, "Creator and Creature," Introd.

opposite of that which corrupt nature is inclined to follow . . . . Conformably to the received maxim of the healing art, that 'heat must be counteracted by cold and cold by heat', the heavenly physician ordered us those remedies which are directly opposed to our sins. Therefore He prescribed purity for the lascivious, meekness for the choleric, and humility for the proud."[1]

[1] Hom. 32 in Evang.

LESSON X.

Humility in practice — Three Degrees of humility.

Humility, like all the virtues, does not consist in theory, but in practice; not in words, but in deeds; not in mechanically bending one's knee or striking one's breast, but in subjecting one's intellect, will and whole being to the Almighty. It springs from reverence for God as naturally as a tree springs from its root.[1] It is in the life of a Christian what the dominant chord is in a piece of music. It enters into all his relations with his Creator and his fellow-creatures, and imparts to them a peculiar tone and quality, much easier to feel and enjoy than to define and explain.

"You ask me," writes St. Augustin: "What holds the first place in the religion and teaching of Christ? And I answer: Humility. The second? Humility. The third? Humility. For all true Christian wisdom is summed up in the practice of sincere and solid humility."[2] In the same sense, the holy Doctor writes elsewhere: "Two loves have built up two cities. The love of self, carried to contempt of God, has built

[1] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. II. II. q. 161.
[2] Letter 56.

up the Earthly City; the love of God, carried to contempt of self, has built up the Heavenly City."

Contempt of God argues the height of pride; contempt of self, the depth of humility. As pride leads men to disregard the authority of God, so humility leads them to submit themselves in all things to his will. As the words of Lucifer, "I will be like the Most High," manifested his pride, so the words of our Redeemer, "not as I will, but as Thou wilt," manifested his humility. The chalice presented to Him was bitter; yet He would drink it. Humiliation, scorn, ignominy, suffering and death were naturally most repugnant to Him; yet He would endure them. It was the will of his heavenly Father; and that was sufficient for Him. "He *humbled* Himself, becoming obedient unto death: even to the death of the cross."[1]

Do we wish, then, to be sure, that we are making progress in virtue? Let us see, how we are advancing in the path of humility; in the last analysis, holiness is reduced to an unselfing of self, or an effacing of self for the love of God. "He is perfect," writes St. Thomas, "who is so disposed interiorly that he contemns himself and everything he has for the sake of God." And do we wish to test the degree of humility to which we have attained? Let us examine the sincerity of our submission to the divine will: the

[1] Phil. II. 8.

test is a plain and practical one, as we shall presently see.

We may be habitually disposed to accept humiliation, scorn, ignominy and all that is most abhorrent to nature, rather than break a divine commandment which obliges us under pain of *mortal* sin. Herein consists the first and lowest degree of humility. — Or, again, we may be habitually disposed to accept humiliation, scorn, ignominy and all that is most abhorrent to nature, rather than break a divine commandment which obliges us under pain of *venial* sin. Herein consists the second degree of humility. — Finally, we may be habitually disposed to accept humiliation, scorn, ignominy and all that is most abhorrent to nature, even when there is no danger of sin, *either venial or mortal*, solely and simply from a desire of being more conformable to Christ, "who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame."[1] Herein consists the third and highest degree of humility.

Remark, that there is no question of particular acts of virtue; but of an habitual state of the soul. This distinction is important; because the particular acts which we perform, do not always correspond to our habitual state. Thus one may be habitually disposed to die, rather than commit a mortal sin; and yet he may fall, under the stress of temptation. Or, on the

[1] Hebrews XII. 2.

other hand, he may be habitually living in the state of mortal sin; and yet he may resist a powerful temptation, with the aid of a still more powerful actual grace.

Bearing this in mind, let us enter upon a careful study of the three degrees of humility, as just defined; such a study will be very profitable to us.

The first degree of humility, then, consists in the habitual disposition, to endure anything rather than commit a mortal sin. It is absolutely necessary for salvation; because the bare thought, deliberately entertained, of committing a mortal sin, under any given circumstances, is itself a mortal sin, and, unless retracted and repented of, suffices to exclude us from heaven. It is very imprudent, however, to imagine ourselves exposed to violent temptation and then to ask ourselves, if we should remain faithful under it. It is a suggestion of the evil one, not to be dwelt upon but promptly resisted by reflecting that our heavenly Father, who allows no one to be tempted above his strength, will temper His grace to our needs, provided only that we do what in us lies.

St. Peter had reached at least the first degree of humility, when he protested to his Divine Master: "Yea, though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee."[1] But, overconfident of self, he heeded not the warning of Christ, rushed recklessly into

[1] Matth. XXVI. 35.

danger, and fell. His fate is that of many who are accounted fairly good Catholics. They wish, indeed, to avoid mortal sin; but, aiming no higher and yielding to the downward tendency of human nature, they fail of reaching the mark which they have set for themselves. They break their most sacred promises, not once only like Peter, but time and again; they alternate between rising and falling, repenting and relapsing into sin. A deplorable state, most assuredly, and well calculated to make us tremble!

Certainly, if we have our salvation at heart, we must aspire to a higher degree of humility, and be habitually so disposed that, happen what may, we shall not deliberately commit a venial sin. Even apart from the fact, that this is morally necessary to secure ourselves against grievous falls, nothing could be more reasonable. For, after all, is not venial sin an offence of God? Is it not, next to mortal sin, the greatest misfortune that can befall us?

Now, in order to attain to this second degree, "we must make ourselves indifferent to all creatures;" that is, by dint of continual efforts and victories over nature, we must establish ourselves in a state of equilibrium, not allowing ourselves to be drawn towards the honors, the riches and comforts of the world, more than towards contempt, poverty and suffering, so long as it is not evident, in our individual case, "what will be more conducive to the end for which

we were created."[1] The reason is that, unless we are thus "indifferent to all creatures," the attraction which we feel towards what is agreeable to nature, may easily get the better of us, even when there is danger of sin. It is most reasonable, therefore, not to yield to that attraction, until we are sure that it is not opposed to our spiritual interests.

But there is a still higher degree of humility. For, instead of being simply "indifferent to all creatures," whether pleasing or displeasing to nature, we may *incline* towards humiliation, scorn, ignominy and all that is abhorrent to nature, in preference to the opposite, for the sake of closer conformity to our Lord, who has left us an example, that we should follow in his steps.[2]

And why do we say, that we may *incline* towards humiliations, rather than that we may *embrace* humiliations? Because in practice we are not always free to choose what is most repugnant to nature. We may have to vindicate our good name against false imputations, because the loss of it may give scandal or destroy our influence for good. We may have to accept or retain an honorable position, because it may enable us to labor more effectually for our salvation and the salvation of others.

In these and similar cases, there can be no doubt

[1] Spiritual Exerc. of St. Ignatius: "The End of Creatures," and "The Second Degree of Humility."

[2] I. Peter II. 21.

about the course which we ought to take; nor shall we fail against perfect humility by following it, provided we leave the result, with the fullest resignation, in the hands of God. But when it is not evident, what is most for God's glory, the third degree of humility prompts us to desire humiliations and sufferings, in order to be more like to our Divine Redeemer, who chose them as his own portion upon earth.

This is a sublime degree of virtue, because it is an unselfish submission and a complete surrender of ourselves to the Almighty, who willed our perfection to consist in our resemblance to his Divine Son, in whom He is "well pleased." Hence, other things being equal, we please Him more by a life of humiliation, poverty and suffering, voluntarily embraced, than by a life, however virtuous, spent in the midst of the honors, riches and comforts of the world. Theoretically these two modes of life, so different from each other, may give Him equal glory; practically the former gives Him incomparably more glory. All this is so evident to every one who knows even the first principles of spirituality, that it suffices to state it.

Should we not, then, "be zealous for the better gifts"? Should we not "follow the more excellent way"?[1] Should we not aim at the third degree of humility? The strongest motives, certainly, urge us to do so.

[1] I. Cor. XII. 31.

First and foremost among these motives is our love for our Divine Lord, who addresses to us all the words spoken of old to his Apostles, "I have given you an example, that as I have done, so you do also."[1] "Love," it has been said, "either finds men alike or it makes them so." Not only do they copy the good qualities and excellences, but even the foibles and defects of those whom they love. Bosom friends become in a manner identified with one another. Like David and Jonathan, they seem to have but one soul animating two bodies; they share their fortunes with one-another, for good or ill, for weal or woe; and, so far as depends upon them, they hold everything in common. "The soul of Jonathan," so we read in Holy Writ, "was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . . David and Jonathan made a covenant . . . . And Jonathan stripped himself of the coat with which he was clothed; and he gave it to David, and the rest of his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle."[2]

The closer the bonds of friendship which unite men together, the more do they love to associate with each other. They cannot bear to be parted; they find no real pleasure in other company, however agreeable it may be; they would rather abide together in suffer-

[1] John XIII. 15.
[2] I. Kings XVIII. I. 3, 4.

ing, than enjoy themselves with others, not so dear to them. "I will go unto death with Thee," exclaimed St. Peter in the ardor of his love for his Divine Master. Such is the natural disposition of the human heart. Who has not felt it? Who has not experienced the sad pleasure of sympathy for an afflicted relative, a father or mother, a sister or brother, a son or daughter?

Think of the fond mother whose child, stretched upon a bed of sickness, is hovering between life and death. Could she forget herself so far, as to join in social amusements and diversions? to go to a play, an opera, a ball? Impossible! The very suggestion of such pastimes seems a cruel mockery. She can hardly be induced to leave the sick-room, in order to snatch a few moments of much-needed repose. Skilful physicians may be at hand, experienced nurses may wait upon the patient with the utmost care. It does not satisfy the parent's love. She herself must be beside that darling child, she must bend over that loved form, she must bathe that feverish brow with her own tender hand. She must be there, to watch through the long, sleepless night; to see, to hear, to suffer with the sufferer. For she does suffer most keenly; every sign of pain sends a sharp, quick pang through her whole frame.

Such is an earthly mother's natural love, a faint image of the love, natural as well as supernatural,

which dwelt in the soul of the immaculate Mother of God. Could that beloved Mother have torn herself away from the cross of Calvary, though every look at her Divine Son drove the sword of grief to her very soul? "Verily," answers St. Bernard, "a sword pierced thy soul, O Blessed Mother; for, not until it had passed through thy soul, could it reach the body of thy Son. After thy own sweet Jesus had given up the ghost, the cruel spear which opened his side, did not reach his soul; but it passed through thine. His soul was no longer there; but thine could not be torn away."[1]

But why mention the Virgin Mother, whose love for her Divine Son merited for her the martyr's palm, at the foot of the cross? Let us rather ask: Could the penitent Magdalen have torn herself away from her suffering Lord, though it wrung her heart with sorrow to gaze upon Him, and drew from her eyes floods of tears, as copious as those with which she had formerly washed away her sins? Nay, she lingered even about the empty tomb; "and, when others had departed, she departed not." And why so? We may answer in the words of our Lord Himself: "Because she loved much." Love of her Divine Master explains all.

Well, then, our Saviour's whole life upon earth was a life of humiliations and sufferings, "a cross and a martyrdom." In the prophetic words of Holy

[1] Serm. de 12 Stellis.

Scripture, He was "a worm and no man, the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people."[1] He was "in labors from his youth." He was "saturated with revilings." All this and much more, "it behoved Christ to suffer, and so to enter into his glory."[2] Can we wish to be better treated than He was? Can we think of enjoying ourselves, away from Him? Does it not seem impossible, if there burn in our hearts the faintest spark of love?

Add to this, that our Lord's humiliations and sufferings were all for us, all freely accepted for our sake, all endured for love of us. "He was offered up, because He willed it."[3] He loved us and "delivered Himself up for us."[4] He has, therefore, a special title to our gratitude, as well as to our love. And how shall we show our gratitude? An example drawn from profane history will give us the best answer.

Ancient writers relate, with great admiration, the story of two friends, one of whom, having been unjustly condemned by a tyrannical ruler, craved the small boon of being allowed to revisit his home and bid a last farewell to his mourning family. The other pleaded for him, offered himself as a hostage and, in case the condemned man failed to return by a given time, agreed to lay down his life instead. The con-

[1] Lament. III. 30. Psalm LXXXVII. 16, XXI. 7.
[2] Luke XXIV. 26.
[3] Isaias LIII. 7.
[4] Ephes. V. 2.

ditions were accepted and acted upon. The days of grace passed, the fatal hour struck, and yet the reprieved man did not make his appearance. The hostage was, therefore, led to the place of execution, his neck was bared, the executioner's sword was unsheathed and ready to descend, when lo! there suddenly rushed upon the scene a man, breathless with haste and excitement. It was the reprieved man, just in time to save his friend from death.

All of us were condemned, and justly so, for our many transgressions. But Christ, the friend of our souls, mediated in our behalf, obtained a suspension of the sentence, and offered to die for love of us; yea, He did actually die for us. We cannot rescue Him. But we can sympathize with Him, associate ourselves with Him, and, to an extent, share his lot with Him. Or, to use his own words, we can drink the chalice which He drank, be baptized with the baptism wherewith He was baptized, carry our cross and follow Him. If we do all this, of our own free choice and with full resignation to God's holy will, we shall practice the third degree of humility.

Another consideration, already touched upon above: Christ is not only our Redeemer, but our model, as well; and, because He is our model, it was necessary that He should embrace a life of humiliation and suffering. Were it not for this, He might have come on earth as a powerful monarch, to receive the

homage and adoration of mankind. Thus, perhaps, He would have come, had not Adam sinned;[1] thus the carnal-minded Jews expected Him to come; thus He will come at the end of time.

There was no danger for our Lord in the honors of the world, which were his due; but there is great danger in them for the vast majority of fallen men. And He came as a model, not for the few, but for the many. He showed them in his own person, what is best for them; He pointed out to them the way which they must walk; and that is the way to Calvary, the royal way of the cross. "If, indeed, there had been anything better," writes the author of the IMITATION, "and more beneficial to man's salvation, than suffering, Christ certainly would have showed it by word and example."[2]

Unless, then, we have the clearest evidence to the contrary, we must conclude that humiliations and sufferings are best for us: above all, if we are fond of the honors, flatteries and caresses of the world. In that case, humiliation is a medicine, bitter no doubt, but very necessary: all the more necessary, because it is so difficult to take. The great repugnance which we feel, shows the diseased state of our souls.

Hence, in the Book of SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, St. Ignatius directs those especially who feel great repug-

[1] It is the opinion of eminent theologians that God would have become incarnate, even if man had not fallen.

[2] B. II. c. 12. n. 15.

nance to a life of humiliation, to ask our Lord to choose them for it.[1] So likewise he exhorts his spiritual children, "to love and earnestly desire . . . . . to be clothed with the livery of their Lord, for his love and reverence; insomuch that, if it could be without any offense of the Divine Majesty and without sin on the part of their neighbor, they would wish to suffer reproaches, slanders and injuries, and to be accounted and treated as fools, without, however, giving any occasion for it." And the reason which he assigns is, that we must "desire to imitate and resemble, in some sort, our Lord Jesus Christ, ... who gave us an example, that in all things, as far as by the assistance of God's grace we can, we may seek to follow Him, since He is the true way that leads men to life."[2]

Furthermore, the Saint himself prayed that the Religious Order which he had founded, might never be without persecution; because he believed that, so long as it was persecuted, it would preserve its primitive spirit. And, of a truth, nothing is better calculated than persecution, to free a religious community from unworthy members, to test the sincerity of the fervent and to draw forth the good which is in them. "Jesus always had ignominy, poverty, pain for his companions," said Father Balthasar Alvarez

[1] Annot. 16. and Note after the Med. on the Three Classes of Men.

[2] Exam. IV. 44.

to his novices. "If you will not have them for yours, you cannot be in the Company of Jesus."

Persecution, according to the figurative language of Holy Writ, serves in the hands of God, as a winnowing-fan, to separate the chaff from the wheat in his granary; as a refining-furnace, to purify the gold of our good deeds; as a wine-press, to prepare the wine of solid virtue. It is, therefore, very profitable to us. Yet, at the same time, it is very distasteful to nature. Even after asking Almighty God to crush us in the dust, we may find it hard to put up with a disparaging word or a contemptuous look. But let us not despair, and, in spite of our reluctance, let us say to our Lord, in the words of the Psalmist, "It is good for me, that Thou hast humbled me."[1]

By this means, we shall gradually accustom ourselves, to bear greater trials with equanimity. Nay, as the author of the IMITATION assures us, we shall come to have so great a love for afflictions and tribulations, as not to wish to be without them; because we shall believe ourselves by so much the more acceptable to God, as we have more to bear for his sake. This is not due to man's power, but to God's grace, which can and does effect great things in frail flesh, so that what it naturally abhors and flies, even that, through fervor of spirit, it embraces and loves.[2]

[1] Psalm CXVIII. 71.
[2] Book II. c. 12, n. 8.

Then, with St. Teresa, we shall desire to suffer or to die; with St. Catherine of Sienna, we shall refuse the crown of roses, offered us by our Lord, in order to wear his own crown of thorns; with the Apostle of the Gentiles, we shall "greatly abound with joy in all our tribulation."[1]

[1] II. Cor. VII. 4.

LESSON XI.

Conscience — A Lax Conscience.

In order that we may acquire a knowledge of ourselves, of the good and evil tendencies of our nature, of the passions which hold sway in our bosoms, of the failings to which we are subject, as well as of the virtues which we possess, Almighty God has given us an interior monitor that speaks to us in his name and lets us know, by unmistakable tokens, what is pleasing or displeasing to Him. This interior monitor we call conscience.

Its very name imports, that it makes us conscious, or aware of something which passes within ourselves and touches ourselves.[1] And what is this something, of which it makes us conscious or aware? The agreement or disagreement of our conduct, under certain given conditions, with the will of God; and consequently our innocence or guiltiness in his sight. In other words, conscience is the judgment which our reason passes upon the goodness or malice of our own actions, not in the abstract, but in the concrete and with all their accompanying circumstances. Or, in a broader sense, it is our reason itself, in so far as it

[1] St. Thomas Sum. Theol. I. q. 79. art. 13.

passes this judgment. Hence it has also been called the "moral sense" or "moral faculty."

Before we perform an action, it tells us what we are morally bound to do, allowed to do or forbidden to do. It commands, it permits, it prohibits. Under this aspect, it is technically styled *antecedent* conscience. After we have performed an action, it declares what has been well done or ill done. It approves or reproves, it accuses or excuses. And, under this aspect, it is technically styled *consequent* conscience.[1]

Taken in the former sense, conscience is the proximate rule of the morality of an action which we are about to perform. To use a familiar expression: if we act "according to our conscience" or "with a good conscience," we do well; if we act "against our conscience" or "with a bad conscience," we do ill. Taken in the latter sense, conscience is a criterion, though not infallible, of the dispositions with which we have performed an action. That is to say, the verdict which conscience pronounces upon what we have done, or the feeling of satisfaction or remorse which we experience, helps us to decide whether we have acted according to the dictates of conscience or against them, and consequently whether we are innocent or guilty in God's sight.

But in order that conscience may be a safe rule and criterion, its judgments must be a reflex of the

[1] Id. ibid.

divine judgments. It must show us to ourselves such as we really are, and appear to the eyes of God Himself. It must be like a balance which corresponds to the recognized standard of weight; like a clock which marks faithfully the passing moments of time; like a thermometer which indicates accurately the degrees of heat and cold. It must be neither insensible, nor over-sensitive to the changes which come over our souls. It must neither palliate nor exaggerate our faults. It must, in brief, be neither lax nor scrupulous; because neither a lax nor a scrupulous conscience is a correct standard of right and wrong.

This is a matter, demanding the serious attention of all that are in earnest about their salvation, because it is far-reaching in its application to the spiritual life. For, as St. Ignatius observes, "the evil one is wont to study, what kind of conscience each soul has; whether delicate or obtuse. If he finds it to be delicate, he endeavors to make it more delicate still, in order that, having brought it to a state of extreme anxiety, he may the more easily put it to confusion and flight. For instance, if he knows that a soul consents to no sin, mortal or venial, nay that it cannot so much as endure the shadow of sin, he does his best to make it judge that there is sin where there is no sin. The obtuse soul or conscience, on the contrary, he strives to make still more obtuse, so that, if before it made light of venial sins, it may now care little for mortal sins also, and daily fear them less."

Wherefore, concludes the Saint, "the soul that desires to advance in the spiritual life, must always tend towards the side opposite to the one to which the enemy is endeavoring to draw it. So that, if he is seeking to make the conscience more obtuse, the soul must make it more delicate. In like manner, if he is seeking to make it more delicate, the soul must establish itself in a quiet middle position."[1]

The practical conclusion, therefore, is that we must be on our guard, both against a lax conscience, and against a scrupulous conscience. And what is a lax conscience? What a scrupulous conscience?

A lax conscience is one which is prone to make light of one's responsibility, and for frivolous reasons to see no sin where there is really sin. It resembles a barometer which records only those violent atmospheric disturbances that portend almost inevitable ruin and death, and records even them but very imperfectly.

Sometimes this failing to see sin where there is sin, or failing to see its grievousness, is due to a natural lack of moral susceptibility and delicacy, or to a defect of religious training and discipline in childhood. It argues ignorance, rather than disregard of one's obligation; a simple error of judgment, rather than a laxness of conscience in the proper sense of the word. It may, therefore, be wholly inculpable

[1] "Spiritual Exercises", on Scruples.

in its origin. In this case, so long as one is not aware of his obligation to correct his standard of right and wrong, he commits no sin by following his conscience, however much its judgments may be at fault. And thus, by accident, ignorance or error may save some souls that would otherwise be lost. One, whose notions of right and wrong are loose and erroneous, may be strictly faithful to his obligations, so far as he knows them, while another, whose moral discernment is keen and delicate, may deliberately do what he judges to be a mortal sin. The former, following the behests of his conscience, will not be guilty before God, though the action which he does is in itself grievously sinful; the latter, on the contrary, disobeying the voice of his conscience, will fall from grace, though the action which he does is in itself perfectly innocent.

It is true, nevertheless, that those who do not fully realize their responsibility, are exposed to great spiritual dangers and illusions. They are apt not only to do many things which are objectively wrong, but to contract the habit of doing them. And when they finally advert to the sinfulness of their conduct, they often give no heed to the feeble warnings of conscience, and deliberately persist in the course upon which they have entered.

But a lax conscience has far more fatal consequences, when it proceeds from a guilty perversion of

the moral sense, as in the case of the Pharisees who "strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel;"[1] who found fault with the Apostles for not keeping "the tradition of the ancients" about washing "their hands when they eat bread," while they themselves transgressed "the commandment of God for their tradition;"[2] who thanked the Almighty, in their self-righteousness, that they were "not like the rest of men,"[3] though He that is Truth itself assures us that "unless our justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."[4]

How complete must have been their moral blindness! How hateful their conduct in the eyes of our Divine Lord, since He pronounced against them this terrible malediction: "Wo to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: because you tithe mint, and anise, and cummin, and have left the weightier things of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith." — "Wo to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but within you are full of rapine and uncleanness." — "Wo to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: because you are like to whitened sepulchres, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within

[1] Matth. XXIII. 24.
[2] Matth. XV. 2, 3.
[3] Luke XVIII. 11.
[4] Matth. V. 20.

are full of dead men's bones, and of all filthiness." — "You serpents, generation of vipers, how will you flee from the judgment of hell?" [1]

There are as many Pharisees now as in the time of Christ, not only among those outside of his fold, but even among nominal Catholics who hold intercourse with them and adopt their maxims. It is sad to see, how quickly and how completely that intercourse perverts their moral sense and changes their notions of right and wrong. A strange "judicial blindness" seems to come over them. They call "evil good, and good evil: they put darkness for light, and light for darkness: they put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." [2]

They are quite aware of their duty; and, therefore, they are inexcusable. They know full well what the laws of God and of the Church require of them; but they heed it not. They will tell you, with great apparent unconcern, that they cannot believe that God, who is so good, will condemn them for missing Mass on Sunday or eating meat on Friday; that they are honest and upright in their dealings; in fact, better than many practical Christians.

They adopt a very convenient code of morality, quite independent of the known will of God. They lay great stress upon the observance of certain out-

[1] Matth. XXIII. 23 and seqq.
[2] Isaias V. 20.

ward formalities and artificial rules of propriety. They keep up the semblance of virtue, and even practise some natural virtues, which are congenial to their disposition or which somehow recommend themselves to their taste. And so, fully content with themselves, they close their ears to every appeal of grace, and beguiled by a false sense of security, fall into a fatal spiritual slumber, from which nothing but a severe shock can arouse them.

From such a state to the state of a seared conscience there is but one step. A seared conscience! A conscience as hardened and callous and insensible to remorse, as seared or cauterized flesh is to pain! Surely, in the words of a well-known spiritual writer, "this is a fearful possibility. And yet, to use the Apostle's expression, 'the Spirit manifestly saith'[1] that there is such a thing."

"There are some possibilities on earth which we cannot bear to think of without shuddering. It is generally God's merciful ordinance that we should not know them in the individual cases, even when we see them. One of these is the possibility of a man's going hopelessly out of his mind, when he is in a state of mortal sin. If he is to have no intermission of his madness, no lucid interval before his death, if he was actually in mortal sin when the last step of his aberration was completed and reason had abdicated

[1] I. Tim. IV.

her throne entirely, then he is as it were damned already. He walks about the earth a living part of hell. His fate is sealed while the sun still shines upon his head, and the flowers grow beneath his feet, and the birds sing as he passes. He smiles, but he is lost. He sings, but he is the hopeless property of God's great enemy. Kindness touches his heart, but grace has ebbed from it forever. He belongs to the dismal centre of the earth; it is only by accident that he is walking on its radiant surface."[1]

Such a state is one of this world's fearful possibilities; and the state of the seared conscience is a dreadfully near approach to it. To do grievously wrong and yet scarcely to advert to it, to commit mortal sin and yet to feel no self-reproach, to live at enmity with God and yet not to dread his wrath: this is to have a seared conscience.

It is the natural consequence of a life of sin, of habits of criminal self-indulgence, of continued resistance to the teasing solicitations of grace, of a sacrilegious use of the sacraments, of a deliberate stifling of the voice of conscience. That interior monitor, persistently unheeded, has become silent; God Himself, long repulsed and contemned, has ceased to knock at the door of the sinner's heart as strongly as He used to do, to speak to his will as distinctly, and to enlighten his intellect as clearly.

[1] Faber, "Creator and Creature." Book III. c. III.

The sinner has overlooked and passed by the Almighty, writes the author just quoted. He did so contumeliously at first; but his habitual contempt has superinduced oblivion. It seems as if the Almighty were going to retaliate and for the present at least to overlook and pass the sinner by. The unhappy man no longer knows when he is in danger. He resembles a sailor that has lost his chart. He can tell nothing of his latitude and longitude. No land is in sight: nothing but a waste of boundless waters. The sun is hidden, and he can take no observation. The night is so grim and murky, that not a star will give him an indistinct notion where he is. The needle is snapped, and he can tell neither north nor south, neither east nor west.[1]

How frightful the chastisement seems! Still, even in the chastisement there is perhaps mercy; because the sinner is at least somewhat less guilty than he might otherwise be. And so he goes blindly after his lusts, drinks in sin like water and revels in vice, apparently without being conscious of his condition. If we ask him to enter into himself and have pity on his poor soul, he will probably answer us that he has done no wrong; that he has killed nobody, robbed nobody; that he has nothing to confess or repent of. "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sin, contemneth."[2] He no longer feels the stings of

[1] Id. ibid. accommodated.

[2] Prov. XVIII. 3.

conscience. Hence we say of him that his conscience is dead, or that he has no conscience.

Is not such a one on the high-road to final impenitence and perdition? Is he not guilty of the sin about which St. John writes: "There is a sin unto death; for that I say not that any man ask?"[1] True, so long as there is life, there is hope of forgiveness. "God desires not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live."[2] He is always willing to pardon his prodigal children, when they return to Him. Nay, while they are away, in "a far country," He pities them, and puts it into their hearts to rise, to go to their Father, and to say "I have sinned." But will they hearken to the voice against which they have so long closed their ears? Will they be ready to undertake the long, weary journey, back to the home which they have left? Will they ever recover that heavenly wisdom and that spiritual self-respect which they have lost? Will they acquire again that delicacy of conscience which they have forfeited? Without a miracle of grace, such a change of heart seems impossible. And who will dare look for a miracle in favor of those who have made themselves unworthy even of the ordinary aids of grace? It is possible, no doubt, because "with God are all things possible." But no one, certainly, that is in his sober senses, would stake his own salvation upon it.

[1] I. John, V. 16.
[2] Ezechiel, XXXIII. 11.

Every one, therefore, should ask himself: Am I obedient to the dictates of conscience, mindful of its reproofs? or am I deaf to its voice, heedless of its warnings? And if he discovers that he is prone to make light of his obligations, he should counteract that tendency, by interpreting the decisions of his conscience in the severer rather than in the milder sense. If he doubts, whether something is a sin or not, whether it is a mortal or venial sin, he should inquire and remove his doubt before acting. For, if he recklessly disregards it, he may make himself guilty of a mortal sin, even in matters which of themselves involve no grave obligation. If he doubts whether, on any particular occasion, he gave full consent or not, to what was grievously sinful, he should presume that he did give full consent, and consider himself bound to confess his sin.[1] The reason is, that only in this way can he hope to compensate for the defects of a sluggish conscience, always inclined to minimize his responsibility and his guilt. But, not content with merely correcting its errors, he should stimulate it into activity, by reflections calculated to awaken a wholesome fear of God's judgments, until he is assured that it fulfils its office with promptitude and fidelity.

There is nothing more precious in the spiritual life, than a delicately sensitive and reliable consci-

[1] Lehmkuhl, I. 65; Gury, I. 50.

ence. To form it, is one of the principal functions of Christian education, one of the most stringent duties of Christian parents. The example set by them and the other members of the family, every word spoken and every action done before their children, the associations and the moral atmosphere of the household, all have an influence, subtle and imperceptible, yet certain and lasting, as the influence of good manners. As those who have lived from childhood in the midst of refined society, have a delicate sense of what is becoming in the eyes of the world, so those who have grown up in the bosom of a truly virtuous family, have a delicate sense of what is becoming in the eyes of heaven.

Thus are acquired those Catholic instincts, which are often the best guides in matters of faith and morality, as well as the surest preservatives from error and vice, and which are found even in the illiterate and the young, to an extent which puzzles the wise of this world. To recall but one familiar example: we read of St. Stanislaus Kostka, that, when he was scarcely more than a child, an expression ever so little offensive to Christian modesty, uttered in his hearing, would throw him into a swoon, and that consequently his presence became an effectual check upon his elders.

A case like this is not disposed of or discredited by suggesting, as has been done by some who are in-

fected with the religious scepticism of the day, that, on the one hand, so innocent a youth would not have understood the meaning of the indelicate words which he heard, because "to the pure-minded all things are pure," and that, on the other hand, he would not have suspected harm in words which he did not understand, because "charity thinketh no evil." For, even apart from the fact that God who "giveth understanding to little ones," wished to use this child of benediction to reprove and confound the aged, a similar sensitiveness, especially in what touches the angelic virtue, is common, in a greater or less degree, to all the young whose consciences have been properly educated. So long as they retain that sensitiveness, the Spirit of the Lord dwells within them and reveals Himself to them, though, like the child Samuel, they may not at first know that it is the Lord. Happy they, if, obedient to the voice which calls, they say: "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth." He will manifest Himself more distinctly day by day, and none of his words "shall fall to the ground."[1]

The little plant, called *Mimosa Pudica*, is so sensitive that it shrinks and folds its leaflets upon each other, not only when one actually touches it, but even when one comes towards it upon the distant meadow. Behold here an emblem of a conscience, which is at once innocent and quiveringly delicate;

[1] I. Kings, III.

and all the more delicate, precisely because it is so innocent. As it suspects no evil which does not exist, so it is quick to detect evil which does exist. It has an unerring presentiment of moral dangers, when they are still far off. As the little chicken instinctively takes fright upon the appearance of a hawk and hides itself beneath its mother's wing, so too the well instructed conscience instinctively takes fright upon the appearance of its spiritual enemies and flees for refuge to its heavenly Father.

This is the kind of conscience that we should all cultivate in ourselves, and obey as the "Voice of God."

LESSON XII.

Conscience — A Scrupulous Conscience.

Diametrically opposed to a lax conscience is a scrupulous conscience; that is, a conscience which is prone to exaggerate one's responsibility, and for frivolous reasons to see sin where there is no sin, or to see mortal sin where there is only venial sin.

Yet, not every exaggeration of one's responsibility is a scruple, in the proper sense of the word. "It is common," observes St. Ignatius, "to call, by the name of scruple, a deliberate judgment that pronounces something to be a sin, which is not a sin; as if, for example, on perceiving that in walking we had trodden upon a cross formed of straws, we should conclude that we had committed a sin. This, however, is not strictly speaking a scruple, but an error of judgment."[1] It is a false affirmation, while a scruple, properly so called, is no affirmation at all.

A conscience, under the influence of scruples, is indeed prone to exaggerate one's responsibility, but it pronounces no decided judgment. It fears to give a verdict, it hesitates, it falters. It resembles an electrical instrument which is abnormally sensitive, which always flutters and taps uneasily, and which, in

[1] "Spiritual Exercises", on Scruples.

certain atmospheric conditions, becomes utterly unreliable for purposes of observation.

"There is a scruple, properly so called," continues the Saint, "whenever, after treading on such a cross, or after any thought, word or deed, there comes to us from without a suspicion of having committed a sin, and though, on the other hand, it seems to us that we have not sinned, we yet feel a perturbation of mind, in so far as we doubt and in so far as we do not doubt."[1]

Yet again, just as an exaggerated judgment about one's responsibility or guilt is not a scruple, in the proper sense of the word, so neither is a purely speculative doubt. Such a doubt not unfrequently occurs to upright souls, that are not at all inclined to scrupulosity; but it does not disturb their peace of mind, and it vanishes instantly, when they learn that there is nothing wrong in the action of which there is question. Not so a real scruple, which is always accompanied by "perturbation of mind," more or less sensible, and which persists in spite of one's better judgment and the decision of a prudent director.

Let us give an example to illustrate our meaning. Two good practical Catholics, returning from church on a Sunday morning, fear that, owing to the many distractions which they have had, they have not satisfied their obligation to hear Mass. A spiritual

[1] Id. ibid.

director, well acquainted with their interior dispositions, after patiently listening to them, bids them both put away all anxiety. One of the two promptly acquiesces in the decision and remains perfectly satisfied. The other, on the contrary, continues to feel uneasy, and experiences an inexpressible yearning to seek additional security, either by assisting at a second Mass or else by further explaining his case and questioning his confessor. The former had only a speculative doubt, the latter a scruple.[1]

It is not, therefore, a simple doubt, liable to occur to any one, but the "perturbation of mind," accompanying an unreasonable doubt, which characterizes a scruple and gives it force and strength. And whence this perturbation of mind? Whence this unwillingness to yield to reason? Not certainly from the superior or intellectual part of the soul which is convinced by arguments, but from the inferior or sensitive part which is agitated by passions or emotions.

The passion or emotion which plays the principal part in exciting and fostering scruples, is fear: fear of sinning, fear of deceiving one's director, fear of not having explained oneself sufficiently, fear of acting against one's conscience, fear of being disquieted at the hour of death. A scrupulous conscience, then, may be accurately defined: A conscience easily

[1] "L'Ange Conducteur des Ames Scrupuleuses," Part I. c. I. Societé de St. Augustin, Desclée, De Brouwer et Cie, 1898.

troubled by some unpleasant emotion or passion, such as fear, which disposes it to see sin where there is no sin, or to see mortal sin where there is only venial sin.[1]

Every emotion or passion produces upon the body an impression, more or less perceptible, which often manifests itself outwardly in a feverish flush of the countenance, an accelerated beating of the pulse, a nervous twitching of the muscles, and a general restlessness or agitation. And in all cases, unless duly controlled, it overexcites the imagination and clouds the intellect. Thus it happens that a tendency to scrupulosity is often mainly due to physical causes. It is found especially in virtuous persons of a keenly susceptible, impressionable or emotional temperament. Such persons may be ever so clearsighted, ever so well instructed about their obligations, ever so able to solve the doubts of others. It is all to no purpose. When their own consciences are concerned, they have no control of their imaginations; they seem to lose common sense; they suffer from a waking nightmare or mild form of monomania; in brief, they are the victims of illusions or misleading impressions.

These impressions may be false, or too intense, or purely subjective.

Impressions are false, when they misrepresent the object which causes them. A concave or convex

[1] Id. ibid.

mirror reflects only distorted images, and changes the comeliest forms into monsters. Even so a conscience, under the influence of scruples, misrepresents a person's life and conduct. It exaggerates some circumstances, while it extenuates others, and thus it destroys the proportion of parts. Motives which are abundantly sufficient to justify or excuse an action, are thrown so far into the background, that they disappear from view, while passing thoughts which involve little or no responsibility, are made to stand out in bold relief. And so the most innocent things grow into moral monsters that terrify the conscience.

Impressions are too intense, when they are stronger than those produced, under ordinary circumstances, by the same object. In certain cases of nervous weakness, sights and sounds, most grateful to the senses in their normal condition, become extremely painful. The light of day distresses the poor sufferer, the twittering of a bird annoys him, the unexpected appearance of a friend frightens him, the gentlest rap at the door alarms him. He trembles, he starts, he shrieks, without any apparent reason. In like manner, the most harmless objects alarm the conscience that is abnormally sensitive to impressions from without, and unreasonably fearful of spiritual danger. The mere apprehension of danger is sufficient to arouse temptation, or what seems temptation, and to keep the imagination in a state of frantic excite-

ment. Horrible pictures of sin, or of what is mistaken for sin, start up before the mind, without order or sequence, and look so much like reality that the bewildered soul considers itself vanquished. Yet, all the while, there has been no sin nor even danger of sin, but only extreme dread of sin.

Impressions are purely subjective, when there is no object to correspond to them, or able of itself to produce them. There are those who, when they hear of a disease, especially if it be of a somewhat mysterious nature, forthwith imagine that they are afflicted with it, or have been afflicted with it. They will entertain you by the hour, if you let them, with explanations of all the symptoms which they have noticed in themselves, and will expect you to believe that they have actually had all the ailments, which they so pathetically describe.

Such cases, strange as they are, have an exact counterpart in the spiritual life. For there are persons who cannot listen to a sermon on sins, especially of a certain kind, without feeling convinced that they are committing them, or have committed them in the past. They will weary the confessor or director with interminable accounts of their spiritual experiences, and accuse themselves of numberless misdeeds, of whose real nature they probably have little or no conception.

Again, there are those who continually see images

of things, which are not actually before their eyes, and which, perhaps, have never been before them, under the forms which they assume. These images, commonly called *spectra*, at one time appear as black spots or lines, at another as insects or serpents, varying in shape and number, with the varying health or occupation of the sufferer. Others continually hear certain words resounding in their ears: words, it may be, of prayer or of blasphemy, of benediction or of malediction. And unless they are well instructed, they feel convinced that a good or evil angel is speaking to them, though there is not the slightest reason for suspecting a preternatural manifestation. Phenomena like these are familiar to directors of souls, as well as to physicians. They are mere phantasms, or impressions which do not proceed from any object actually present to the senses. They are purely subjective modifications of the organs, due to the morbid condition of the optic or acoustic nerve.

Similarly, those things at which scrupulous souls take fright, are often purely subjective, as unsubstantial and unreal as the apparitions which children and nervous people have, on a dark night, after hearing or reading a ghost-story. Making daily companions of their gloomiest fancies, they mistake the possible, or even the impossible, for the real. The thought comes to their mind that, at a certain time and under certain circumstances, they might possibly

have failed to satisfy a certain obligation or done something that was not right. And forthwith their consciences begin to upbraid them. Meanwhile their feverish imaginations do not allow them to see, that they were not placed under such circumstances at such a time; that they did not advert to any obligation imposed upon them; that they struggled, too violently perhaps, against the bare suggestion of evil.

One cannot better describe their mental condition than in the words of the poet: "And nothing is, but what is not." In their souls all is doubt, uncertainty, hesitation, perplexity und confusion. They confound impression with judgment, feeling with reason, thought with will, fear of temptation with temptation, and temptation with sin. One moment they discern a ray of hope; "it seems to them that they have not sinned." The next moment they are involved in the profoundest darkness; and then, as St. Ignatius expresses himself, they "feel a perturbation of mind." To adopt a scriptural phrase, "seven times pass over them" in a few minutes. Their lives and actions come up before them and change appearance, with the rapidity of the pictures in a kaleidoscope. The more they examine and reason and subtilize, the less do they understand themselves.

At times they seem to themselves to be giving way to all sorts of sins in thought; to doubts against faith, to blasphemy and contempt of holy things, to desires

of another's death or joy at his misfortunes, to evil intentions in doing the most innocent actions, to resolutions of sinning under certain imaginary conditions, to immodesties and other vices, whose very name they hold in perfect abhorrence.[1] Or again, they fancy that they are making promises, perhaps vows, because some whimsical notion crosses their troubled brains; and they fear, that they shall be bound by such imaginary promises, unless they instantly make a mental protest against them, or even repel them by external marks of disapproval. They shake their heads, they roll their eyes, they knit their brows, they wave their hands and go through a variety of extravagant gesticulation which makes others doubt of their mental sanity.

Suspecting dangers and pitfalls everywhere, they hesitate to act, lest they should do wrong; and when, with fear and trembling, they have followed their better judgment, they imagine that they have been false to their conscience.

Under these circumstances, the practice of virtue and of the interior life is beset with innumerable difficulties. An effort to pray or meditate is a signal for troubles and anxieties, which instantly fix upon the mind and keep it busy with everything except thoughts of God.

Confession, above all, is the rack of the scrupulous

[1] Id. c. XX.

conscience. The bare remembrance of having to make a confession conjures up phantoms of terror. Doubts, hazy, vague and indistinct, begin to loom up in the distance, and by degrees grow into shapes as horrible, ghastly and monstrous, as spectres in a dream. What to say in confession, how to say it, what circumstances to express, in what order, in what manner: these and multitudes of other anxious reflections haunt the poor penitent, up to the very moment that he enters the sacred tribunal. And then, who shall depict his agony, his terror, his confusion? If he failed to say all that comes to his mind, or to say it in the manner most repugnant to his feeling, he would imagine that he is not sincere. Thence interminable explanations, useless details, wearisome repetitions and exaggerations which try the patience of his confessors. Often he knows full well, that he is making himself ridiculous; and yet, though intensely mortified thereat, he cannot restrain himself. In fact, he seems at times to derive a strange relief of mind from the thought that he is passing for a simpleton.

But his relief is of short duration. Hardly is he out of the confessional, when his troubles begin afresh. The preparation for confession, the examination of conscience, the accusation of sins, the words exchanged with the confessor, the act of contrition, the absolution, in short, all the actions which have reference to the sacrament just received, come up before

him. And woe is him, if he allows his thoughts to turn towards them! It is like stirring up a beehive. Swarms of doubts and fears at once surround and attack him. Things may come to such a pass, that the most innocent souls who would rather die a thousand deaths than offend God grievously, persuade themselves that they are always living in the state of mortal sin.

Thus harrassed by the dread of imaginary sins, some lose their health or their reason, while others give way to despair, and, abandoning the practice of their religious duties, end by deliberately committing real sins which they think it impossible to avoid. Many more live perpetually in a state of mental anguish, strangers to that peace which is promised to men of good will, and which is vouchsafed even to the worst of sinners, when they repent of their ways. Seeing in God only a stern judge who always holds the rod extended to chastise them, they cannot serve Him with alacrity and generosity of spirit. Instead of rising aloft on the wings of love, they drag themselves wearily along the ground, like prisoners trailing their chains behind them.

It is plain, therefore, that scrupulosity is a spiritual ailment which, if neglected, may have the most fatal consequences. It is, nevertheless, an ailment with which Almighty God not unfrequently permits those to be afflicted, whom He designs to raise to a high

degree of virtue. "Continuing for some time," says St. Ignatius, "it helps in no small degree the soul which is giving itself to spiritual things, cleansing it and withdrawing it from every semblance of sin, conformably to the well-known saying of St. Gregory: *It is the part of good minds there to recognize a fault, where there is no fault.*"[1]

But, though God may allow us to be tried for a time with scruples, He cannot Himself be their author nor wish us to be guided by them. God is all light; and scruples can live only in the darkness of doubt. God is all intelligence; and scruples are the product of misleading sensitive impressions. God is all truth; and scruples are essentially based on error. It is a duty to resist them, because it is a duty to follow the dictates of reason and not the vagaries of imagination.

Now, herein precisely consists the whole difficulty for the scrupulous man. He is the sport of his imagination. He takes illusions for realities, doubt for certainty. He is blind to his own condition, and therefore he has no alternative between going hopelessly astray and trusting himself entirely to the care of his spiritual guides. "Walking by faith and not by sight,"[2] he must surrender his judgment to theirs and follow to the letter the rules which they lay down for him.

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," — On Scruples.
[2] II. Cor. V. 7.

These rules, though more or less varied according to circumstances, may generally be reduced to one, namely: *Take no notice whatever of your doubts*. Therefore treat as absolutely null and void all laws, obligations and prohibitions which are *doubtful;* and *regard as doubtful* all laws, obligations and prohibitions which are not as certain to you, as it is certain that two and two make four. Therefore do, without fear, whatever at first sight and without examination, you do not know to be *certainly* sinful. Therefore do not consider yourself obliged to confess a sin, if you have the *least doubt* whether it is mortal or not. Therefore do not mention in confession a mortal sin which was *perhaps* confessed before, nor repeat a confession which was *perhaps* bad or invalid.[1]

Followed faithfully and perseveringly, according to the direction of a prudent confessor, these rules cannot fail to set aright the troubled conscience. But in order to follow them faithfully and perseveringly, the penitent must practise the most generous and unreserved obedience. He must take to heart the warning of Our Lord, "Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven;"[2] and distrustful of self, he must be content to be led by the hand of another. He must consider, as especially applicable to his confessor and director,

[1] "L'Ange Conducteur des Ames Scrupuleuses," c. XI.
[2] Matth. XVIII. 3.

that other saying of our Blessed Lord, "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me."[1]

Surely, nothing could be more explicit and peremptory. The confessor may err; but, if what he prescribes is not manifestly sinful, his decision is the expression of God's holy will, and must be obeyed as such, at the risk of incurring the divine displeasure. How consoling to the obedient, how terrifying to the disobedient! "The obedient man shall speak of victory,"[2] says the inspired writer in the Book of Proverbs. And later on he subjoins, as if by way of contrast: "Hast thou seen a man, wise in his own conceit? There shall be more hope for the fool than for him."[3]

Ponder these words, ye poor, distracted souls, who "abound in your own sense," and learn, that your worst temptation is, to rely upon your vain conceits; that your principal duty is, to turn your scruples against themselves. Instead of fleeing from imaginary enemies, attack your real enemies; overcome your unreasonable doubts; trample under foot your foolish dread; emancipate yourselves from the slavery of your senses, and be free with the freedom of the children of God.

All this will seem very hard to you at first;

[1] Luke, X. 16.
[2] Prov. XXI. 28.
[3] Id. XXVI. 12.

because it will require you to give up your own judgment, and to gain a complete mastery over self-love; and this is impossible without a severe struggle. But once the victory is won, your conscience will abide in peace. If you sow in tears, you will reap in joy.[1]

Gradually, as reason begins to reassert itself once more, and to correct your false und unjust view of God, divine charity will fill your souls and take the place of that unreasonable, servile, perplexing fear which is the ordinary source of scruples. "God is charity," exclaims the Beloved Disciple, "and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him. In this is the charity of God perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment . . . . Fear is not in charity; but perfect charity casteth out fear."[2]

[1] Psalm CXXV. 5.
[2] I. John, IV. 16. 17. 18.

LESSON XIII.

Examination of Conscience — The General Examination, a means of self-knowledge and self-reform.

Many persons are fond of looking at themselves in a glass, to observe and improve their bodily appearance; few are fond of looking at themselves in the mirror of conscience, to observe and improve their spiritual condition. They dread to meet their souls face to face, or to behold them reflected in their lives. Like Adam after his fall, they would fain hide themselves, if they could, from their own eyes, as well as from the eyes of God.[1]

And yet, what can be more profitable to all of us, than to observe and improve our spiritual condition? What more conducive to our happiness, in time and in eternity? To observe our spiritual condition, is to call ourselves to account for our actions, or, in the words of the Apostle, to "judge ourselves;" and "if we judged ourselves, we should not be judged."[2] To improve our spiritual condition, is to do what we can to merit the approval of conscience; and if we merited the approval of conscience, we should merit the approval of God Himself, who speaks to us by the voice of conscience.

[1] Genes. III.

[2] I. Cor. XI. 31.

It is little wonder, therefore, that the Saints and Masters of the spiritual life thought so highly of self-examination, or examination of conscience; that they seemed to give it the preference to every other devotional exercise; that they practised it so assiduously themselves, and recommended it so earnestly to others. For examination of conscience is an inquiry into our past conduct; a close scrutiny of the motives which have influenced us; an investigation, whether we have obeyed or disobeyed the interior monitor who said to us, "Do this or avoid that"—followed by a firm resolve, to hearken hereafter to all his warnings and suggestions.

In brief, as ascetical writers tell us, examination of conscience is a practical prayer, possessing the virtue and efficacy of every other form of prayer, and capable of regulating all our spiritual affairs. It is of two kinds, general and particular, each having its own definite end or object, though not meant to be performed separately and independently of the other.

The General Examination, as its name implies, is so called because it is made upon all the sins, faults, shortcomings and imperfections, into which we have fallen during a certain given period of time. Its object, as set forth by St. Ignatius, is two-fold: "To cleanse the soul, and to dispose us the better for confession." [1]

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," after the "Foundation."

And truly, if we make it diligently as prescribed, once or twice a day, we may well dispense with any lengthy preparation, just before entering the sacred tribunal of penance. Nevertheless, the object of the General Examination of Conscience, as we take it at present, is not so much to dispose us for confession, as to cleanse the soul from every stain or defilement of sin, and to set in order all our spiritual affairs. "What the broom is in housekeeping, the pruning-knife in gardening, the balance-sheet in book-keeping," the compass in navigation, the pendulum in a clock, that the General Examination of Conscience is in the spiritual life;[1] the Particular Examination, as we shall see, is subordinate and subsidiary to it.

The General Examination, then, embraces five points:

1. To thank God for the benefits received from his hands.

2. To ask grace to know and to root out our sins.

3. To demand an account of our souls concerning our thoughts, words and actions, from the time of our last examination up to the present.

4. To implore pardon of God for our trespasses.

5. To make a firm purpose of amendment.

All these points are intimately connected with one-another, and necessary for the full effect intended to be produced by the examination.[2]

[1] Meschler — "The Spir. Ex. of St. Ign. explained."— "Examination of Conscience."

[2] "Spiritual Exercises," as above.

1. Before all else, we must thank God for the benefits received from his hands, in order that, setting them over against our sins, we may be the more easily moved to repentance. Thus, when the prophet Nathan sought to make David realize the full enormity of his double crime, he began by recalling to the king's mind the favors which the Almighty had lavished upon him.

And, surely, nothing is better calculated to make us enter into ourselves and to cover us with shame and confusion, than the contrast between the divine bounty and our ingratitude. God has loved us from all eternity; He has created us, in preference to so many myriads of possible beings that would have served Him more faithfully; He has preserved us, as it were by a continuous creation, till the present moment; He has showered upon us countless other blessings in the natural order, known only to ourselves. More than this: Out of love for us, He has delivered up his only Son, to ransom us from the slavery of sin into which we had sold ourselves; He has called us from the darkness and shadows of infidelity to the light of the true faith; He has so often pardoned us our sins in the holy sacrament of penance; He has nourished us with the precious body and blood of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist. More still: He has prepared a place for us in heaven, where, if we serve Him faithfully upon earth, He

Himself will be our "reward exceeding great;"[1] and the degree in which He will communicate Himself to us, will depend solely upon our correspondence with his grace. What return can we make, that is equal even to the least of his benefits? "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that he hath rendered to me?"[2] asks the Royal Prophet. It were little, indeed, if we consecrated to Him ourselves and our belongings, "all that we are and have." Have we done so? Or have we, even this day, abused his gifts, and turned them against Him?

2. Before answering these questions, we must begin, in the second point, by imploring the divine light, and say in the words of Holy Writ: "O my God, enlighten my darkness."[3]

In a dark or dimly-lighted room, we take no notice of the dust that is thick upon floor, and wall, and furniture. But as soon as the noon-day sun pours in its waves of light, we discern even the tiniest motes that swim in the golden flood. Well, then, by nature our souls are like that dark or dimly-lighted room; and hence we perceive not the sins wherewith they are defiled. Let the supernatural light of heaven enter them; and forthwith we shall discover even the slightest flaws and blemishes that mar their beauty. We must, therefore, ask our Lord, to make us see our

[1] Gen. XV. 1. 2.
[2] Psalm CXV. 12.
[3] Psalm XVII. 29.

sins as He sees them, in order that we may detest them as He detests them. "In thy light," exclaims the Psalmist, addressing the Almighty, "in thy light we shall see light."[1]

3. Enlightened from above, we pass on to the third point; and reviewing hour by hour, or period by period, the time elapsed since our last examination, we question ourselves concerning our thoughts, words and actions.

To facilitate this scrutiny, St. Ignatius recalls some fundamental truths, far-reaching in their application to the spiritual life. Thoughts, he reminds us, may originate in our own brains, or they may be suggested by the good or the evil spirit. This distinction, clear to all in theory, is often forgotten in practice by souls that seek in all earnest to be well with God. Many such are apt to hold themselves responsible for everything that passes within them. If they are pursued by some evil thought, whether of blasphemy or of impurity, or any other, they are disturbed and distressed beyond measure; they fret and worry over it all day; they dare not approach the Holy Table; they spend their examinations in vain efforts to discover, whether they have yielded or not; and they are never done coming back to the subject in their confessions. Meanwhile, perhaps, they make light of their neglect of duty and of their indevotion

[1] Psalm XXXV. 10.

in prayer, to which their useless anxiety has given occasion. This is precisely what satan has in view; because he knows full well that it will impede, if not arrest altogether, their progress in the way of virtue.

Not to fall into this trap, set for us by our spiritual enemy, we should never forget that, so long as we repel a temptation, however abominable and importunate it may be, we do not offend our Lord but gain merit in his sight; that, through want of promptitude or earnestness in resisting, we may easily commit a venial sin; but that we are never guilty of mortal sin, unless we consent, or take wilful pleasure in the evil suggestion. Mortal sin is such a monster, that no one who really cares about serving God, can fall into it, without being painfully conscious of it. "You may take no notice of a fly," say spiritual writers, "but, were a scorpion to enter your room, you would be startled by its presence. In like manner, you may not always advert to your venial faults; but were a mortal sin to find its way into your soul, you would take fright at its appearance. You are not accustomed to live in such company, and cannot fail to be fully aware of the intrusion of so unwelcome a stranger."

If, therefore, when the storm of temptation has passed, it is not clear to you that you have sinned mortally, you should throw yourself, without further

examining the matter, into the arms of the divine mercy, resolve to keep a strict watch over your heart in future, and for the rest abide in peace and in lowliness of spirit before the Lord.[1]

After questioning ourselves concerning our thoughts, we must question ourselves, in like manner, concerning our words. These may be sinful in three ways: because they are directly injurious to God, to our neighbor, or to ourselves.

Words directly injurious to God, are not only words of blasphemy and false or rash oaths, but also, though in a lesser degree, all words wanting in the reverence which is due to God, or to holy persons and holy things by reason of their intimate relation to Him.

Words, directly injurious to our neighor, are especially: words of calumny, that is, saying what is detrimental to his reputation, and false; and words of detraction, that is, saying what is detrimental to his reputation, but true. For it is not allowed to make known our neighbor's secret sins, except in the interest of the wrong-doer himself, or of others in danger of being harmed by his wrong-doing. Otherwise, the disclosure of his secret sins makes us more or less guilty, according as we injure him more or less seriously. In general, we may say that if, without sufficient reason, we make known a mortal sin

[1] Meschler, "Spir. Ex. of St. Ign." Woodstock Translation, p. 40.

which is not public, we sin mortally; and if we make known a venial sin, we sin venially. "In a word, as often as we reveal another's fault or defect, we at the same time reveal our own faults or defects."[1]

This is a remark which it behooves us all to lay deeply to heart, nowadays especially, when the good name of the worthiest and most virtuous persons in church and state is as freely bespattered, both in public print and in private conversation, as if the eighth commandment of God had been blotted out, or had lost its binding force. This sinful practice has spread to all classes of society; and more than ordinary precautions are required, to escape the contagion.

As words, directly injurious to ourselves, St. Ignatius mentions idle words, "such as all those must be understood to be, which profit neither the speaker nor anyone else, and which are not even uttered with the intention of profiting anybody."[2] Under this head must certainly be classed the vain and silly gossip, in which not merely the wordly-minded, but even those who make profession of piety, not unfrequently trifle away many a precious hour of their lives. How much matter there is here for self-examination and remorse!

Finally, we must question ourselves concerning our actions. "Passing before our eyes the ten com-

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," as above.
[2] "Spiritual Exercises," as above.

mandments of God, the precepts of the Church and the directions of superiors," writes St. Ignatius, "we must account, that whatever is done contrary to any of these is a sin — more or less serious, according to the different ways of sinning and the different habits of those who sin." And then he subjoins very significantly: "It is not a trifling sin, to put oneself or others in opposition to the pious recommendations or appointments of the rulers of the Church." [1]

These words of the Saint are pointed at the spirit of insubordination to ecclesiastical authority, rampant in his day. But are they not quite as appropriate, at the present time? Is not the same spirit abroad among us? Is it not assumed as a principle, that one may challenge, at will, the recommendation of his betters? that he may sit in judgment upon their appointments or arraign them before the tribunal of public opinion? that he may hold them up, if he feel so inclined, to the ridicule of an unbelieving generation? And are we sure, that we have not fallen under the influence of this un-catholic spirit? that, all unwittingly perhaps, we have not adopted some of its maxims?

Behold in what manner a person must question himself, in order to discover the sins into which he has fallen. His examination, as is evident, must embrace, in the first place, all the mortal sins of which he has been guilty since his last examination.

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," as above; also "Rules for thinking with the Church."

This, however, need not delay him long, as it is to be hoped that, after beginning the practice of daily examination, he will rarely, if ever, have the misfortune of grievously offending his God.

He should direct his attention, in the next place, to his venial sins, many of which would quickly pass out of his mind, did he not make it a point to recall them in his daily examinations. Yet even in venial sins he should carefully distinguish various degrees of guilt. None of them, it is true, deprive the soul of sanctifying grace; still, some of them are much graver and more displeasing to God, than others.[1]

There are venial sins of wantonness, committed with full knowledge and deliberation. These are always grave, because of the great irreverence, not to say insult, offered to the Divine Majesty. They differ from mortal sins, only by reason of the smallness of the matter; and in this it is easy to exceed. So that the sinner goes, with his eyes open, to the very borders of mortal sin, and not unfrequently has much reason to fear that he has crossed them. But, aside from this danger, such sins dull the fine edge of conscience, lessen the fear of God's judgment, strengthen the force of concupiscence, deprive the soul of the special helps destined for it, and expose it, unguarded and unprotected, to the attacks of the devil and of the world. The consequence is the one predicted by the

[1] See Neumayr, "The Science of the Spiritual Life," c. II. art. IV.

Holy Ghost: "He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little."[1] Whosoever, therefore, is in real earnest about serving God, must be on his guard against the slightest deliberate venial sin.

Again, there are sins of habit, committed through culpable negligence, and often allowed to increase, instead of diminishing in number. Such sins are either the cause or the effect of that spiritual lukewarmness which our Lord threatens with his vengeance, when He says to his slothful servant, in the words of the Apocalypse: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth."[2] They provoke in the Almighty a feeling akin to nausea, an inclination to disown and cast off the careless soul. They interfere with the regular flow of grace, which is the principle of her supernatural life, and leave her so weak and faint, that she seems reduced to the last extremity. Her only security against impending spiritual death, is in increased vigilance, and generous efforts to shake off the languor which has come over her. For this reason, she must be continually stimulated to renewed exertion, by the daily examination of conscience.

Lastly, there are sins of surprise, committed through human frailty. They cannot be wholly avoided, without a most extraordinary grace, such as was bestowed on our Blessed Lady; because, despite

[1] Ecclus. XIX. 1.
[2] Apoc. III. 16.

the firmest resolutions, it is morally impossible for us in the state of fallen nature, to be always at our best. Do what we may, we shall at times be off our guard, and shall be betrayed into half-voluntary sins and imperfections. Hence St. James tells us: "In many things we all offend."[1] And St. John affirms that, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."[2]

But such faults, instead of being insurmountable obstacles, may be made stepping-stones to perfection. "Even our errors may contribute towards our spiritual welfare," was a favorite maxim of St. Ignatius. On the one hand, they ought to teach us humility; for they are the fruits which we naturally produce; and the tree is known by its fruit. On the other hand, however, they ought not to discourage us, or make us fear that God has abandoned us: because, "as a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him; for He knoweth our frame."[3] Say to Him, therefore, when you have fallen through weakness: "Behold, I was conceived in iniquity.[4] Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak."[5] A sigh like this merits pardon, and, by raising our confidence in the divine assistance, disposes us to rise promptly. "A just man shall

[1] James, III. 2.
[2] I. John, I. 8.
[3] Psalm CII. 13. 14.
[4] Psalm L. 7.
[5] Psalm VI. 3.

fall seven times," says the Holy Ghost; but he adds, "and shall rise again."[1]

But, in order to acquire a thorough knowledge of the sins into which we have fallen, we must investigate the sources from which they have sprung, and the motives which have led us to commit them. How important this is, will be made clear by the following familiar illustrations.

According to the latest medical theory, all or nearly all physical diseases are caused by minute living organisms, called microbes, which feed upon the human body, waste its strength and menace its life. By means of the microscope, physicians strive to detect these destructive little germs and to study their habits, with the view of removing them or rendering them harmless. Just so, almost all our sins, which are spiritual diseases, spring from our unruly passions, or, what is the same thing, from our vicious tendencies, either inborn or acquired. It should be our earnest endeavor, to discover them, with the aid of the daily examination of conscience, in order to exterminate them, or to correct and control them. Otherwise, we shall continually relapse into the same faults, grow weaker every day, and be in imminent danger of spiritual death.

Still another illustration in point. Physical diseases often have their seat in some internal bodily

[1] Prov. XXIV. 16.

organ and cannot be accurately diagnosed by any external symptoms. But by means of certain rays, which pass through substances impervious to the ordinary light, it is now possible to photograph and observe the bones and sinews, covered with flesh and skin and therefore wholly invisible to the human eye. In like manner, our sins have their seat in the will, and cannot be sufficiently known by outward appearances. Indeed, they may not manifest themselves at all in our external actions. For our actions taken in themselves, are often neither good nor bad; they have only that morality which the will infuses into them. And even when they are seemingly good, they may be really vitiated by the sinful or imperfect motives, which actuate the will — like to Dead Sea apples, which are fair to behold, but which turn into ashes, as soon as they are plucked. So that, to estimate our spiritual condition aright, we must needs penetrate, by a process of critical introspection, beneath the surface of our actions, and strive to gain a fuller and better knowledge of our sins, by investigating the latent motives which prompted us to commit them.

This daily scrutiny of conscience should be thorough. But, in order to be thorough, it need not be lengthy. On the contrary, if we accustom ourselves to act with reflection, if we look about ourselves occasionally to take our spiritual bearings, and survey the ground which we have passed over on the road to

heaven, if, in brief, we keep the thought of the coming examination present to the memory during the course of the day, a few moments — one third of the time, usually set apart for the whole examination — will suffice to recall the sins of which we have been guilty. Turn the search-light of conscience upon your actions; and instantly they will stand out clearly and distinctly before the mind's eye, with all their faults and imperfections, with all their flaws and blemishes.

In this wise, then, the daily examination of conscience gives us a clear insight into our spiritual condition. It aims, however, at something further, as St. Ignatius indicates by the title, "General Examination of Conscience, in order to cleanse the soul." Our knowledge, to be profitable, must be practical; self-knowledge must be directed to self-reform.

Now self-reform, if it be genuine, necessarily supposes two things: namely, a sincere repentance for the past and a determined resolution for the future. Whence it follows, that the fourth and fifth points of the General Examination, having these two objects directly in view, are far more important than the preceding points, which are only as preambles to the rest. On these last two points, therefore, we should dwell at greater length when making our examin-

ation, though little need be added here, by way of explanation.

4. "The fourth point is," in the words of St. Ignatius, "to implore pardon of God for our trespasses." His pardon is conditioned solely upon our disposition to receive it. "A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise,"[1] exclaims the Psalmist. "Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of hosts: and I will turn to you, saith the Lord of hosts."[2] The more heartfelt our sorrow, and the more perfect the motives which inspire it, the surer are we of mercy and forgiveness.

These motives which must be supernatural, that is, known and proposed to us by faith, are suggested in the act of thanksgiving, made at the beginning of the examination. They are manifold. — We may be sorry for our sins, because we have thereby merited punishment, either eternal or temporal. This is the motive of a slave, who dreads the lash. — We may be sorry, because we have lost heaven, or at least that degree of glory which was destined for us. This is the motive of a hireling, who works for wages. — We may be sorry, because sin is of its own nature supremely vile, and most unseemly in a creature that has been elevated to the supernatural order. This is the motive of an honorable man, who respects himself

[1] Psalm L. 19.
[2] Zachar. I. 3.

and values, above all, his dignity as a child of God.— We may be sorry, because we have so ill requited the countless blessings, bestowed upon us by the most generous of benefactors. This is the motive of a feeling soul, susceptible to a sense of gratitude. — Finally, we may be sorry, because we have offended God who is infinitely good in Himself and infinitely worthy of love. This is the motive of a dutiful child, that grieves for having wounded the heart of the best of parents.

All these motives rise, as it were by so many steps, one above the other, from the lowest, which is the fear of punishment, to the highest, which is the pure love of God. The last, being the only motive which is surely capable of producing perfect contrition,[1] is the one upon which we ought chiefly to insist. At the same time, however, we ought not to pass over the others, but use them — and especially the motive of gratitude — as means to an end. For "gratitude," it has been well said, "draws perfect contrition after it, as the needle draws the thread."

How, indeed, can we think of God showering his blessings upon us, without admiring the goodness which pours itself out in such copious streams? How

[1] De Lugo, De Poen. disp. V. 10 seqq. Theologians raise some very subtle questions about the sufficiency of other motives to produce perfect contrition. Whatever may be thought of the theoretic value of the arguments adduced, every one will, in practice, insist upon the motive of the pure love of God.

can we think of God manifesting Himself through his gifts, without being ravished by the "beauty ever ancient, ever new," which is faintly reflected in the works of his hands? How, above all, can we think of God making Himself man, in order to suffer and die for his sinful creatures, without catching a spark of the love which caused Him to "humble" and "empty Himself," [1] for the sake of being like unto us? [2]

Surely, if the good, the beautiful, the lovable, particularly in the moral order, is calculated to win our love, even without regard to any advantage which may accrue therefrom to us, then our Saviour's unselfish love for us should enkindle within our breasts a kindred love for Him, and move us to love Him, even as He loves us — "not for the sake of winning heaven or of escaping hell, not for the hope of gaining aught or seeking a reward . . . but solely because He is our God and our Eternal King." [3]

Surely, we can forget ourselves for a brief spell, to think of Him, who is the delight of the Blessed in heaven, and, yielding our hearts to his divine attractions, can allow them to "run after Him to the odor of his ointments." [4] We need not, however, forget

[1] Philip. II. 7.

[2] This is the way used by St. Ignatius in the sublime Meditation on Divine Love, to lead us gradually from the love of God, who is good to us, to the love of God, who is good in Himself.

[3] Hymn "O Deus, ego amo Te," commonly attributed to St. Francis Xavier.

[4] Canticles, I. 3.

ourselves so completely, as to set aside all other motives of sorrow, save that of pure love. Only, let the pure love of God be the determining motive, and strong enough to exclude sin. That will suffice for an act of pure love, and therefore, also, for an act of perfect contrition; because pure love passes naturally into perfect contrition, as soon as we turn our thoughts to the sins which we have committed.

Perfect contrition, therefore, is not so difficult for persons of good will, as some of them may perhaps imagine. Let us but do what we can; let us make use of such considerations as are calculated to move us to perfect contrition; and let us ask it, with all earnestness, of God. He will not fail us. When we are conscious of having sinned, when we make a genuflection before the Blessed Sacrament, when we take Holy Water to bless ourselves, when we lie down to rest, or at any other time during the day, let us say from our hearts: "I am sorry, O my God, for having offended Thee who art infinitely good in Thyself and infinitely worthy of love." But, above all, when we perform our daily examinations of conscience, let us make acts of perfect contrition. Thus shall we gradually form a habit, which will be of the greatest benefit to us, as a preservative both against an unprovided death and against deliberate venial sin. For there is little danger of deliberate venial sin, and still less of mortal sin, if we frequently renew our horror

and detestation of everything that can displease the Divine Majesty.

5. It is evident, therefore, that contrition for sin necessarily includes "a firm purpose of amendment," which is the object of the last point of the examination of conscience. We should take care, nevertheless, to make an explicit resolution to avoid all sins in general, and those faults in particular, to which we are most subject. We should foresee the occasions on which we are liable to fall, and take the necessary precautions. In fine, we should not merely bewail our weakness in the past, but gather strength for the future; not merely pull down and destroy, but build up and plant;[1] not merely pay off the debts which we have contracted with the Divine Justice, but take measures to lay up rich stores of merit in heaven, "where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal."[2]

[1] Jerem. I. 10.
[2] Matth. VI. 20.

LESSON XIV.

Examination of Conscience — The Particular Examination, a specific for the reform of particular faults.

The General Examination of Conscience is directed, as we have seen, against all our spiritual foes in common. It surveys their field of action, inspects their strongholds, studies their tactics, discovers their designs and acquaints us with the whole situation. It keeps a vigilant eye upon their movements, warns us betimes of their approach, arms us against their assaults, and so preserves us from all grievous disasters.

These advantages are undoubtedly great. Yet, if we wish "to signalize ourselves in the service of our Eternal King" — they are the words of St. Ignatius — we must endeavor to secure still greater advantages. Not content with being on the defensive, we must take the offensive, in imitation of the Royal Prophet, who says of himself: "I will pursue after my enemies and overtake them; and I will not turn again, until they are consumed. I will break them, and they shall not be able to stand; they shall fall under my feet."[1]

[1] Psalm XVII. 38. 39.

"Going counter to the inclinations of flesh and blood,"[1] we must drive our enemies from their intrenchments, and not cease making war upon them, until they are either wholly undone, or so much weakened that they are no longer able to inflict serious injury upon us. We must make captives of them, and, in a certain sense, tributaries and auxiliaries, who shall fight our battles for us, or at least enhance, by their presence, the glory of our triumph.

And how shall we accomplish this object? Not certainly by encountering all of them at once. They are too numerous and too formidable. They resemble those hostile tribes that occupied the Land of Promise, before the arrival of the Israelites. "Thou shalt not fear them," said Moses to the chosen people, "because the Lord, thy God, is in the midst of thee, a God mighty and terrible; He will consume those nations by little and little, and by degrees. Thou wilt not be able to destroy them altogether . . . . But the Lord, thy God, shall deliver them in thy sight, and shall slay them until they are utterly destroyed."[2]

As a general, invading a country, besieges one town or fortress after another, and, when he has reduced it, places a garrison to guard it, so must we attack our vices one after another, and, when we have overcome them, leave a troop of virtues in their stead, to hold the position. Now, this is precisely what we

[1] "Spiritual Exercises — The Kingdom of Christ."
[2] Deuteron. VII. 21. 22. 23.

do by means of the Particular Examination of Conscience, which applies to the spiritual warfare the well-known adage, "If you wish to subdue your enemies, divide their forces."[1] Hence it is aptly defined: A spiritual combat, carried on against some particular fault, until the vice from which it springs, as from its source, has been subdued and replaced by the opposite virtue.

It is evident, therefore, as spiritual writers bid us remark, that, while the General Examination aims, in the first instance, at self-knowledge, as a means towards self-reform, the Particular Examination, on the contrary, pre-supposing self-knowledge, busies itself almost exclusively with self-reform. It is likewise evident, that the direct subject-matter of the Particular Examination can scarcely be a mortal sin; because, on the one hand, all the mortal sins, that a person has upon his conscience, must necessarily be included under every act of contrition which he makes, and, on the other hand, they can easily be avoided by anyone that daily performs the General Examination with the proper dispositions. So that, so far as mortal sin is directly concerned, there is little occasion for that special conflict which the Particular Examination implies.

What, then, is the subject-matter of the Particular Examination? According to St. Ignatius, it is "the particular sin, or defect," that is, imperfection of any

[1] "Divide et impera."

kind, "of which one wishes to correct himself."[1] The same idea is conveyed by the words which the priest says at the Offertory of the Mass, when he prays: "Accept, O Holy Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, this immaculate victim which I, Thy unworthy servant, offer Thee for my innumerable sins, and offences, and negligences."

Sins, in this connection, are faults properly so called — in thought, word, deed and omission — into which we fall frequently and deliberately. Offences are faults less properly so called, which we are wont to commit through human frailty and inadvertence, just as a traveller walking upon slippery ground is apt to fall, when he is ever so little off his guard. Negligences are shortcomings, which cannot properly be classed with sins of omission, and which do not wholly vitiate our actions, but which dim their lustre and mar their perfection. Such, for example, are all those shortcomings, which result from a lack of fervor, of a pure intention, of full correspondence with the lights and graces vouchsafed us, and of other qualities which ought to shine forth in our actions and in our whole lives.

The Particular Examination, therefore, should be directed: first, towards avoiding all deliberate sins; secondly, towards diminishing the number of our lesser offences, and, as far as possible, avoiding them; thirdly, towards diminishing the number of our

[1] "Spiritual Exercises — The Particular Examen."

negligences, and, as far as possible, avoiding them.[1]

In all these cases, there is question of amending some fault, whether it be a sin strictly so called, or a want of perfect fidelity and correspondence on our part. Hence St. Ignatius very properly mentions only sins and defects, as the subject-matter of the Particular Examination of Conscience. Yet it is obvious, that we cannot avoid those shortcomings called negligences, except by the practice of the missing virtue or perfection. For instance, if the negligence consists in the lack of a pure intention in our actions, the only way to correct it, is to be careful in future to have such an intention; and this implies positive acts of virtue.

In general, sins or evil habits may be overcome, either directly by repressing them, or indirectly by practising the contrary virtues.[2] The former is called the negative, and the latter the positive method. Both methods are indicated by the author of the IMITATION, when he writes: "Two things particularly conduce to a great amendment; these are, forcibly to withdraw oneself from that to which nature is viciously inclined, and earnestly to labor for the good which one wants the most."[3]

But, whether we pursue the negative or the positive method, it is essential to full success, that the

[1] "Spiritual Exercises" — Roothaan's Notes on Particular Examen, No. 1.

[2] Louis de la Palma — Partic. Exam. of Consc. IX.

[3] B. I. C. XXV. n. 4.

subject-matter be sharply defined. Not only must we aim at the correction of one vice, or the acquisition of one virtue, at a time, but often we must subdivide the matter into several parts, corresponding to the different ways in which either the vice or the virtue shows itself. For example, if we wish to apply our Particular Examination to rooting out pride and implanting humility in our hearts, it is not sufficient to propose to ourselves, in general, not to take pride in anything and to humble ourselves in everything.[1] Thus proposed the subject-matter is altogether too comprehensive. For pride may betray itself in ambitious thoughts, in boastful words, in haughty deeds; humility, on the other hand, may manifest itself in lowliness of spirit, in meekness of speech, in modesty of demeanor. And each one of these subdivisions furnishes ample matter for the Particular Examination of Conscience.

So much being presupposed, we may ask: What should we take as the subject of our Particular Examination? To this question no general answer can be given. It is a matter which the advice of a prudent confessor or director, aided by the self-knowledge derived from prayer and especially from the General Examination, must determine for each one of us, according to circumstances. However, as a guide for

[1] **Rodriguez — "Christian Perfection," Of the Examen of Conscience, IV.**

the confessor or director, as well as for the penitent, spiritual writers lay down the following rules:

1. Strive to subdue your vices, before you apply yourself to the acquisition of virtue. "The husbandman frees his field from briars, nettles and noxious weeds, before he scatters the good seed over it. In like manner, he that tills the soil of his heart, should begin by rooting up his vices, and then devote himself to cultivating the virtues which will bear fruits of holiness, while, at the same time, they will check the undergrowth of vice."[1] The first subject, therefore, of the Particular Examination should be deliberate sins. Until they have been cleared away, we look in vain for a healthy growth of virtues.

2. Correct your external faults, before others which are purely internal. The latter easily escape the scrutiny of one who has little experience in the spiritual life. They may not be voluntary, because not all our internal actions are under the control of the will; and so it often happens, that the beginner is unable to tell how far, if at all, he is to blame. Begin, therefore, with external actions, which are more easily governed, and more readily recognized as culpable, when they deviate from the laws of God and of right reason.[2] By thus regulating your external actions, you will gradually weaken the vices in which they have their origin. For instance, if the high

[1] Louis de la Palma — Partic. Exam. IX.
[2] Id. XI.

opinion which you have of yourself, shows itself in haughty or boastful words, the effort to check them will make itself felt in your heart, and will deaden the sentiment of egotism which finds expression in them.

3. If you are subject to a variety of external faults, try to free yourself first from such as are more likely to give scandal or to detract from the esteem which a life of virtue ought to inspire in others. For example, if you are accustomed to speak hastily, thoughtlessly, sharply, and thereby perhaps wound the feelings or injure the reputation of your neighbor, reason and charity require you to correct these defects before others which, in themselves, may be far more serious.[1]

4. Again, amend your deeds before your words; because, as St. Ignatius teaches in the "General Examination of Conscience," sins of deed are more serious than others, for a threefold reason; namely, "on account of the greater length of time, the greater intensity of the act, and the greater number scandalized or injured."[2]

5. Beware, however, of being so intent on the correction of external faults, as to pass your whole life therein. After all, it is not external propriety, but internal purity, that we must propose to ourselves as

[1] Rodriguez — "Christian Perfection," Of the Examen of Conscience, III.

[2] Louis de la Palma, as above, XI.

our ultimate aim. We are engaged in a conflict with vice, and vice is rooted in the heart.

Find out, therefore, by means of the General Examination, what is the vice that has the upper hand in you; in other words, find out, what is the chief disorder introduced into the soul by your predominant passion. There is your danger; there is the spot which your enemy will attack; there is the traitor, ready to take sides with him and to deliver you into his hands; there is the Goliah, whose head you must cut off, in order to free yourself from the hands of the Philistines.[1]

If several vices or disorderly passions of different kinds hold sway in your soul, see of what nature they are. Some vices may be called spiritual, because they seem, as it were, to spring up from the soul itself. Such a vice is pride, with all its varieties of vainglory, ambition, haughtiness, disdain, and the like. Other vices, on the contrary, are wholly carnal, because they proceed more directly from the sinful appetites of the body. Such a vice is sensuality, under all its forms of impurity, gluttony, sloth and so forth. These carnal vices, if not restrained, are a source of great and imminent danger; and, therefore, a person who is molested by them, should subdue them before he undertakes the combat against spiritual vices, which may indeed inflict many slight

[1] Rodriguez — as above — II.

wounds upon the soul, but which do not easily kill it.[1]

6. In case you are not troubled by any vices in particular, or have so far subdued them, that your faults are few and light, it is well for you to change from the negative method to the positive, and to take, as the subject of your Particular Examination, the virtue which you desire especially to acquire. For though, as already stated, the immediate object of the Particular Examination is the correction of your faults, it is not well to spend your whole time in this alone. He that is engaged in weeding a garden, is well employed; but it does not follow therefrom, that he must never do anything else. On the contrary, the object he should have in view in pulling up the weeds, is to plant flowers in their place. In like manner, when you spend your Particular Examination in rooting up the vicious inclinations of your soul, you should propose to yourself, to plant the sweet-scented flowers of virtue in their stead.[2]

What should move you, above all, to adopt the positive method, when your passions rarely rise in open or violent revolt against reason, is that otherwise you will derive little or no profit from your Particular Examination. In fact, the occasions of combat being rare, you are apt to forget the subject altogether, and to imagine that your enemies have surrendered, when

[1] Louis de la Palma, as above, XII.

[2] Cfr. St. Thomas. Summa Theol. II. II. q. 24, art. 9.

they have only withdrawn into their stronghold. You fancy forsooth, that you have subdued the passion of anger, because nothing has occurred to ruffle your temper. But you are greatly deceived. It is not astonishing that the sea is smooth, when there is not a breath of air to disturb the calm. Neither is it astonishing that you are quiet, when there is not a living soul to arouse your wrath. Your passions seem to be dead; but, in reality, they are only asleep. Unless you strengthen and arm yourself against them, while they leave you a little respite, they will assault you all the more violently, when they awake.

Instead, therefore, of laboring to correct a defect which you seldom commit, aim at acquiring the opposite perfection. Do you wish to guard against ever treating others with haughtiness or contempt? Learn to look upon yourself as the least of all; and take, as the subject of your Particular Examination, the practice of humiliation. Do you wish to make sure of not repining, when adversity will come to try you? Endeavor to see the hand of God in all the occurrences of life; and take, as the subject of your Particular Examination, the practice of perfect conformity to the divine will.[1]

Whatever virtue you select, let it be genuine, solid, supernatural, capable of bearing the stress of trying circumstances, and of being carried to the highest degree of perfection. Let it be the virtue

[1] Rodriguez, as above, III.

which is most opposed to your predominant passion, the virtue which you need most in your present state and condition of life, or the virtue which will unite you most closely to God, the source and centre of all holiness and perfection.

Having thus determined the subject-matter, we perform the Particular Examination, together with the General Examination, as an adjunct and auxiliary to it. That we may do so with the best possible results, St. Ignatius, who was the first to reduce the Particular Examination to a systematic form and to promote its practice throughout the world, gives us some valuable directions.

"The daily Particular Examination," he writes, "embraces three times and two siftings."

"The first time is straightway in the morning on rising, when a person resolves to guard diligently against the particular sin or defect, which he desires to correct."

"The second time is in the middle of the day, when," after begging light to know how often he has offended Almighty God, he begins the scrutiny of his conscience, as explained in the General Examination, by first "demanding an account of his soul concerning the particular fault in question . . . . from the hour at which he rose down to the present." Then he marks, in a book prepared for the purpose, how many "times he has fallen;" and, when he makes the act of

contrition and purpose of amendment for his sins, he includes, in an especial manner, "the particular fault in question."

"The third time is in the evening, when he makes a second sifting in like manner;" and, after marking in his book, how many times he has fallen, he again says an act of contrition and resolves to be more on his guard in future, especially against "the particular fault in question."[1]

These practices, and especially that of marking the number of one's falls, will perhaps be looked upon by some as childish minutiae, calculated only to hamper the spirit. But they are not so regarded by those who are experienced in the spiritual life. As a proof, it may be allowed to refer, in passing, to two eminent ecclesiastics, now departed, who were well known to some readers of these lines, and who were highly esteemed by all that knew them, for their sound practical judgment, no less than for their manly virtue. One of these spoke of the little book of the Particular Examination, as the pass-book, in which we daily note our current account with heaven, and which, if faithfully kept to the last, we may present with confidence at the judgment-seat of God. The other, a much-beloved prelate, who had resigned the

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," as above. St. Ignatius here supposes the Examination of Conscience to be made twice a day, as is done by many Religious Communities. But the same rules may easily be applied, if the Examination is made only in the evening.

dignity of office for the lowliness of a religious life, on perceiving that the hour for the usual examination of conscience had come, took leave of the friends with whom he was conversing, and, drawing forth from his pocket the booklet of his Particular Examination, shook it playfully in their faces, with the remark: "For me this is very necessary."[1] These words, said with an air and tone of earnest conviction, are quite as applicable to all of us, as to the speaker. Not that the success of the Particular Examination depends essentially upon recording, even to the last unit, the exact number of our daily failings; but that neglect in marking, with becoming diligence, the result of the Examination, gradually leads to forgetfulness, if not to complete disuse, of this important exercise in a fervent Christian's life.[2]

The object of this marking of our faults is to fix the attention, and to prevent us from relaxing our efforts during the course of the day. The same is true also of other practices, recommended by St. Ignatius, under the head of "Four useful Additions, for the easier and quicker extirpation of any particular sin or defect."

"The first is, that each time a person falls into that

[1] Each one can prepare for his own use the little books of Particular Examination. They may, however, be procured, together with the prayers suited to the various points of the Examination, from some Catholic book-seller.

[2] Meschler — "Sp. Exerc. of St. Ign. explained. — Part. Exam."

particular sin or defect, he lay his hand on his breast, and grieve for his fault. This he can do, even in the presence of others, without their perceiving it."

"The second is, that at night," after making the second scrutiny of his conscience, he compare it with the first, and "observe if any amendment has taken place."

"The third is, that he compare the examinations of the first and second day, and see if there has been any improvement."

"The fourth is, that he compare one week with another, and note if, in the present week, he has improved on the preceding."[1]

Made in accordance with these directions, the Particular Examination cannot fail to produce the happiest results. "It owes its great efficacy," writes an experienced director of souls, "to these three things: first, it divides our enemies, and brings all our forces to bear upon one of them at a time; secondly, it attacks our disorders and sinful habits at the root; thirdly, it keeps us at work all day and calls for the exercise of every power of the soul."[2] And thus it becomes the specific for inveterate and radical defects, which resist all other means of self-reform.

Deep-seated and chronic evils, it is true, are not cured speedily, nor by the ordinary remedies; but it is also true, that no spiritual evils, however obstinate,

[1] "Spiritual Exercises," as above.

[2] Meschler, "Spir. Ex. of St. Ign. explained."

can resist the persevering efforts of a resolute will, aided by the grace of God. "Let no one then despair," says St. Basil, "because of his sinful inclinations; rather, let him bear in mind that, as skilful culture can change the qualities of trees and shrubs, so zeal and industry in the pursuit of virtue can check and correct all the vicious affections of the soul." [1]

In a similar manner, one of the ancient Fathers of the Desert counseled and encouraged an anchoret, who had grown so remiss in the discharge of all his spiritual duties, that lukewarmness seemed to have become his normal condition; so much so that, though moved to lead a life more worthy of his calling, he thought his case too desperate to begin the work of self-reform. The venerable patriarch, desiring to give additional force to his advice, put it in the form of a parable, somewhat as follows: — A certain man, having a field all overrun with thorns, briars and tares, told his son to stub and clear it. The youth, therefore, set out one day to do the work assigned him; but immediately upon beholding it, he lost heart, threw himself upon the ground and spent his time in sleep. The next day he went out again, and did likewise. Questioned at night, how he was progressing, he frankly confessed that he had not the courage to undertake what appeared to him a hopeless task. Whereupon his good father reproved him, saying: "You do wrong, my son, to look upon

[1] **Reg. fus. disput. resp. 10.**

your work in the gross, as if you had to do it all at once. Mark out for yourself, in the morning, as much as you can easily do in a day, and address yourself with a will to your appointed task. Before long you will find that it is not so hopeless as you now fancy to yourself." The son followed his father's advice, and full soon the whole field was cleared.[1]

Let us all apply this parable to ourselves, and mark out, every morning, a definite amount of work to do, in the field which our heavenly Father has given us to cultivate. Let us daily clear away some of the thorns, briars and tares, which overrun it and hinder the growth of the good grain. In other words, let us make strenuous and persevering efforts to free our souls from the sins, offences and negligences into which we are wont to fall, and which we recognize as the greatest impediment in the way of a Christian life.

With this object in view, let us diligently perform the Particular Examination of Conscience. It is a most efficacious means of self-amendment and spiritual progress. For it is a combat carried on against our faults, until the vices, from which they spring, have been subdued and replaced by the opposite virtues; and, as the pious author of the IMITATION assures us, "if every year we rooted out one vice, we should soon be perfect men."[2]

[1] Rodriguez, as above, "The Value we ought to set on spiritual things," XI. [2] B. I. C. XI. n. 5.

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LESSON XV.

Character — Its physical basis is the bodily temperament — Varieties of temperament, how far good.

The masters of the spiritual life tell us, that the Examination of Conscience should be directed, in a very special manner, towards the correction of those faults which spring from a defect of character, and the acquisition of those virtues which are best suited to form and build up character. The reason which they give, is that whatever is connected with a man's character, affects his inmost self and has, therefore, a direct bearing upon his whole life. Whence it follows, that the study of character is of paramount importance to every one, as well for his own sake, as for the sake of those whom he may be called upon to guide in the way of God.

Character! What is character? Something very easy to feel, but not so easy to define. It is too complex, to admit of a rigorous definition. But it may be described in terms, which will answer our purpose as well as a definition. In its broadest sense, it signifies a mark or note, which distinguishes one person or thing, or one group of persons or things, from others. Specifically, as applied to man, character "comprises the whole sphere of the educated will, and stands for

the sum of those ethical traits which give each one his moral individuality." It is an index of his ordinary mode of thinking and acting, and consequently of the course which he is likely to pursue under any given circumstances. The more decided his character, the more unwavering, naturally speaking, will be his moral conduct.

The physical basis of a person's character is his bodily temperament. But here again we meet with a difficulty; for temperament, like character, is easier to feel than to define. The word "temperament," in all its acceptations, implies a variety of ingredients which, by being mixed or blended, temper or modify each other. Thus sugar is mixed with wine, until it imparts a certain degree of its own sweetness. Colors are mixed, until they produce the tint or shade desired by the painter. In like manner, in every person's bodily constitution or organization, various qualities are blended, according to some definite rule or proportion; and the physical state or condition which results therefrom, is called his bodily temperament. In some one quality prevails, in others another, permanently affecting their bodily senses, and, through their senses, their spiritual faculties as well. So that a person's temperament often stands, not only for his manner of feeling, but of acting; for his frame and disposition of mind; in brief, for the sum of his native endowments and tendencies.

Five different kinds of temperament are very commonly distinguished;[1] namely, the choleric or bilious, the melancholic, the phlegmatic or lymphatic, the nervous, and the ardent or sanguine. Most of these names are derived from certain humors or fluids, which were said to enter into the composition of the human body. The influence of these mysterious humors upon temperament is at present disputed.[2] But the old names are pretty generally retained, as descriptive of certain recognized types. These types, however, do not represent any strongly marked groups, because none such exist. Indeed no two persons have precisely the same natural temperament, any more than they have precisely the same features; for nature never repeats itself.

Hence it has been said with much reason, that there is an indefinite variety of temperaments, none of which correspond fully to the extremes denoted by the recognized types. Still, as every temperament bears more or less resemblance to one or other of these types, they are very helpful to acquire a knowledge of one's natural disposition.

The choleric or bilious temperament is so called, because it was supposed to be due to a superabund-

[1] Not all are agreed upon the number of temperaments. Some, with Aristotle, admit only four; others six or more.

[2] Some modern writers attribute the diversity of temperament to the blood, others to the nerves, others again to the muscles, etc.

ance of bile. It is distinguished by strong passions and, in particular, by great energy, boldness and tenacity of purpose.

Quick and resolute in every emergency, and never so happy as when wrestling with difficulties, the bilious temperament seems the natural basis of those strong characters, which are destined to lead and rule mankind. Without any conscious effort, it makes itself felt by all that come within range of its influence, and instinctively commands their attention and their respect. It wins the confidence of the timid, overcomes the hesitation of the cautious, breathes a spirit of energy into the languid, and breaks down opposition by the resistless impetuosity of a determined will. It impels rather than attracts, forces rather than persuades men to accept its lead and direction. Herein lies the secret of its strength and of its weakness, of its successes and of its failures. For, as it sometimes achieves phenomenal success when it remains within bounds, so it often meets with utter failure when it overreaches itself. And what is more natural, than that it should at times overreach itself?

The more a man feels his ascendancy over others, the more self-reliant and self-sufficient is he apt to be; and, unless he has been carefully schooled in christian humility, he may come at last to overrate his importance to such an extent, that, practically speaking, he

looks upon himself as independent of external help. You venture to give him information or advice upon a subject, of which you chance to have some personal experience; and you expect, of course, that he will hear you out and be duly grateful for your kindness. But you are greatly mistaken. For, hardly has he caught the general bearing of your message, when he lets you understand that any further explanation is wholly superfluous. You are carrying coals to Newcastle, water to the sea, light to the sun. Spare yourself that useless labor. He knows all, knew it before you spoke to him, knew it long ago — by a sort of intuition or revelation, to be sure, since he had no other possible way of knowing it.

Or, mayhap, he seizes upon some of your words, to give you a learned disquisition. He has on hand a large stock of fixed ideas, which he fits, like Kantian forms, to every imaginable subject. He is able to elaborate a theory at a moment's notice. You have furnished him an opportunity which he cannot allow to be lost. It was so presumptuous of you, to attempt adding to his knowledge. He will read you a lesson to teach you modesty, and to convince you — or at least himself — how very ignorant you are.

It is vain to press your reasons. He does not, or will not, understand them. He has set opinions which it is impossible to eradicate. He abounds in his own sense; and all you say or do only serves to

confirm him the more. He never doubts his own infallibility, never admits that he has made a mistake. He has said *yes*, and he will not say *no*. He has taken a stand, and he will not retreat from his position, however false it may be. His will is the law, the all-sufficient reason, to which everything else must yield. Whatever he wills, he wills strongly and pursues to the bitter end.

To carry his point, he is pompous or imperious, affectedly calm or violently excited, by turns, according as impulse or self-interest happens to move him. In short, he has within him the material of which despots and tyrants are made; he needs only the occasion, to do their deeds of oppression and cruelty.

If he cannot refute you with solid arguments, he assumes a lofty tone, and tries to overpower you with sophistry or to crush you with sarcasm. He does not see that, by this conduct, he is putting himself in the wrong. On the contrary, he fancies that he is making an impression, which will strengthen his position and put you forever in your proper place. An impression he is undoubtedly making: not, however, an impression of wisdom and authority, but of blindness and selfishness; not an impression of constancy and firmness, but of stubbornness and arrogance— the probable forerunners of his coming fall. With all but weaklings, one such exhibition of passion is often quite sufficient to diminish, if not to destroy altogether, whatever authority he may have previously possessed.

If he fails in his schemes or falls from power, he frets and chafes, like a caged lion behind his bars of iron; or, like the exile of St. Helena, dethroned yet not humbled, he eats his heart away, in vain regrets over an influence and a glory which have passed from him forever. His sun rose in splendor, it goes down in gloom. For such a man there appears to be no middle course. He seems destined to be very high or very low, "Caesar or nobody;" very good or very bad, "an angel or a demon."

The melancholic temperament has something in common with the choleric, of which it may perhaps be regarded as a mere variety, though, in many respects, it seems to be the very opposite. It takes its name from a Greek word, signifying black bile; because it was formerly attributed to a redundancy of black bile, which was said to produce groundless fear of evil, followed by useless anxiety and depression of spirit — the well-known symptoms of melancholy.

The melancholic man, like the choleric, not unfrequently displays much energy, boldness and tenacity of purpose, at least along certain lines, within certain limits, and under certain conditions. He has a vivid apprehension of the evils, real or imaginary, physical or moral, which afflict the world or portions of it, society at large or its individual members. He thinks, and broods on the gloomy picture of human suffering and sorrow, of human sinfulness and crime,

until it becomes one with him and shuts out every brighter view of life. The wretchedness and degradation of the poor, the luxury and effeminacy of the wealthy, the helplessness and misery of the weak, the selfishness and cruelty of the mighty and the general corruption of all classes appeal strongly to his feelings, and move him to seek a remedy, regardless of the consequences to himself or to his fortunes. It will require great self-sacrifice! No matter; he is willing to make it. He may fail in his efforts and fall a victim to his devotion! So much the better; he will be a martyr to a cause which he holds dearer than life. This is the view of the world that inspires the zeal of the reformer, whether good or bad, genuine or false, religious or social; the view that often gives point to the denunciation of the Christian missionary, as well as to the harangues of the political demagogue. It is true, so far as it goes, but it is partial and onesided; and, like every partial and onesided view, it is liable to exaggeration and abuse,

A person that habitually takes this view, like one dwelling amid perpetual mists and fogs, sees objects only within a short distance of him, and sees even them but indistinctly. He is frightened at the mere appearance of harm, and magnifies it beyond all proportion. "He sees a tempest in every cloud, a torrent in every rivulet." The world of the present day, as it appears to him, is "wholly evil, irredeemably

lost.... All its roses have thorns under the leaves... Its joys are only other forms of melancholy. Its sunshine is mockery, its beautiful scenery deceit.... Its life is incessant death.... We have no right to smile at anything.... There is a curse upon everything.... Everything is danger; for there is sin everywhere.... Let us live as ancient monarchs lived, in daily fear of poison in every dish."[1]

Thus he reasons; and, retiring into himself, he becomes still more pensive and depressed. From being discontented with everything around him, he passes to being discontented with himself as well. Others are bad enough, he says, but he is worse. Everything is going wrong, and he cannot help it. He has tried to do his best, and has failed. He is not going to try anymore; it is useless. And so all his past courage, zeal and energy vanish into thin air, and give way to pusillanimity, despondency and inaction.

The melancholic man, like the choleric, often exerts a great influence over his fellow-men; but he exerts it in a different manner. He is not naturally harsh and unfeeling, but tender and compassionate. He is not haughty and domineering, but modest and unassuming. He is not feared, but loved by others. His pensive mood has a mysterious fascination, which they feel, though they cannot explain it to themselves.

[1] Faber, "The Creator and the Creature," c. III.

Like those plaintive airs, in which the minor tone prevails, it touches a sympathetic chord within their hearts and makes them responsive to his will. So that, in a certain sense, his weakness is his strength. But if he indulges it overmuch, he becomes unamiable in the eyes of others as well as his own. He becomes languid, drooping, morose and thoroughly miserable. He feels the need of sympathy and looks for it everywhere. Failing to find it, he shuns the society of men, as much as he can, and often ends by being a confirmed pessimist, cynic and misanthrope. So disgusted is he with everything, that, were he not restrained by conscience, he would welcome death as a boon, and perhaps bring it about with his own hands.

The phlegmatic or lymphatic temperament, which was supposed to be caused by a watery fluid in the blood, called lymph, may be briefly and not inaptly described as "coldblooded."

Free from violent passions and emotions, the phlegmatic man is habitually staid and deliberate. He is never carried away by impulse, never does anything by fits and starts. Slow to begin, he is slower still to give up what he has begun. Has he made you a promise? Trust him implicitly. He is as good as his word. Has he undertaken to do some work for you? Rest assured, that it will be well done. He makes no promises that he cannot redeem; he under-

takes no work that he cannot perform. He takes no leaps into the dark. Before embarking in any enterprise, he calculates his chances of failure and success, and counts his losses and gains. He is steady and persevering, orderly and cleanly, laborious and painstaking. He always does his best. But all these excellent qualities are liable to excess. There are persons so deliberate, that they never do to-day what they can put off till to-morrow; never come in time, if it is possible for them to be late; never begin anything, until the favorable moment has passed. They are always thinking and musing, without ever coming to a decision. They spend the greater part of their lives in a sort of day-dream, the nearest approach to complete mental inertia.

Guided by reason alone, the phlegmatic man is usually as clearsighted and fairminded in forming an opinion of persons and things, as he is frank in expressing it. Are you in need of a counsellor upon whom you can rely, of a friend whom you can give your confidence? He is as one in a thousand. He is cautious and prudent; he is "true as gold," and "constant as the northern star." But he is not always as well fitted for action as he is for counsel. He is sometimes overcautious, and timorous of possible difficulties and dangers. For fear of making the least mistake, he refuses to do anything; for fear of running the slightest risk, he is willing to forego the

greatest advantages. In brief, he is absolutely without initiative or enterprise.

Perfect master of his feelings, the phlegmatic man is generally good-natured and even-tempered. Approach him when and where you like, and you will find him ever the same. Imperturbable and unaffected by his surroundings, he possesses his soul in peace. He has no "moods of sunshine and cloud." Though never demonstrative or effusive, he is often quite social and entertaining. His words, few and well-weighed, if not inspiring, are at least hearty and encouraging. There are, however, persons so dull and torpid, that they seem incapable of being roused sufficiently to take interest in anything. Like those mountains of everlasting snows, which never change their rigid aspect, though the sun's genial rays fall full upon them, their hard features never relax into an expression of sympathy which can be perceived by others. Their presence diffuses a cold and wintry atmosphere round about them. The touch of their hands, the sound of their voices, their very look sends a chill through your whole being, and freezes all the courage and energy of your soul. Men like these make a very close approach to the extreme type of the phlegmatic temperament.

The nervous temperament, as its name implies, is now commonly accounted for by the influence of the nerves. It is distinguished by great nervous sensibil-

ity, alertness of body and mind, and delicacy of perception.

So long as it is kept under proper control, it gives a man many decided advantages over those of coarser fibre. Quick and impressionable, he is keenly alive to all that happens about him. Like an Aeolian harp, stirred by every passing breeze, his senses are affected by the slightest change, and give forth a sound which makes itself heard in the inmost soul. As a consequence of this exquisite sensibility, he has by nature a delicate regard for his neighbor's feelings, and a graceful way of showing it. None quicker than he, to discern what is agreeable to others, as well as becoming to himself. None better than he, to minister relief to the sick, or consolation to the afflicted. His heart is as tender, his voice as soft, his touch as gentle as a mother's, when she soothes her suffering child. And to crown his kindnesses, he does them all with an ease and a simplicity of manner, which make it seem a personal favor to him, to accept them at his hands. He is one of nature's noblemen, who perceive at a glance what the proprieties of time and place demand of them.

But if he allows his sensitiveness to get the better of him — and here lies his danger — he becomes a torture to all that have to deal with him. He is no longer master of himself. He depends upon his nerves; and they depend upon his sleep, his digestion,

and a thousand circumstances which it is impossible to foresee. His spirits go up and down, like the mercury in a barometer. You can never tell from day to day, or from hour to hour, in what mood you will find him. You come upon him unawares, and instantly he is in a flutter of excitement. His lips begin to quiver, his fingers work convulsively, his brow darkens, and everything portends a coming storm. He is irritable, impatient, discontented — he cannot tell why — and he relieves his feelings by discharging a shower of lamentations or of invectives upon your devoted head. You or some one else whom he thought his friend, has given him mortal offence. How? Why, you passed him by, without looking at him or saluting him; and he is persuaded that it was a slight. Or you did look at him and did salute him; but there was that in your manner which he interprets as an insult. You smiled so suspiciously, or you turned your head so abruptly! It is vain for you to protest, that you did not see him, that you were preoccupied with other thoughts, that you meant no harm. Your apologies and assurances do not suffice to heal his wounded feelings. There is "no balm in Gilead"[1] for a case like his. Those who know him best, dare not put their thoughts into words and "speak their full, free heart" to him. They study his present humor, "read the day's disaster in his

[1] Jer. VIII. 22.

morning face," and do what they can to avert the threatening outbreak. But all to no purpose! Say and do what they will, they cannot avoid giving him umbrage, when they least expect it. He is too sensitive and too suspicious, to live contentedly even with the best of friends. He is singularly out of place in this matter-of-fact, work-a-day world of ours. His morbid temperament makes him suffer much; but it makes others suffer still more.

The ardent or sanguine temperament is sufficiently defined by the word "ardent" which means warm, and the word "sanguine" which means abounding in blood. It is distinguished by vivid emotions, great activity, and buoyancy of spirit.

The sanguine man is naturally warm-hearted, expansive and generous. His words, his looks, his very presence communicate his warmth to all around him. The merry laugh, which announces his coming, and the genial smile, which lights up his face, are magnetic. They draw the hearts of others towards him, and impart some of his own spirit to them. He is the best, the cheeriest, the most sociable of companions, happy himself and able to make others happy as well. But he is imaginative and impressionable, often volatile and spasmodic, unsteady as quicksilver, and "changeable as the shapes of the clouds on a windy day." He bubbles over with good-nature, and allows it to escape in words before he is

fully aware of it. He speaks and acts as the humor seizes him. You must not, therefore, take him too literally or too seriously, nor rely too much upon his promises or his advice. For he may pass from one side of a question to another, with a suddenness and a fervor which will disconcert all your plans.

The sanguine man is all life and activity. Full of animal spirits, he is restless and uneasy, unless he finds a ready outlet for them. Fertile in resources, he is quick and versatile in availing himself of his opportunities. While others are still thinking and planning what to do, he is doing it. He follows the inspiration of genius, and under its influence is capable of accomplishing much. But he is vehement rather than strong, facile rather than solid, showy rather than reliable. He sometimes produces wonderful results by a few bold strokes, but he rarely does a finished work.

The sanguine man is generally very hopeful. Indeed, one of the first meanings of the word "sanguine" is "hopeful". He takes a sunny view of life and pictures it to himself with the rosiest colors. He is too light-hearted to be discouraged by opposition and reverses of fortune; or, if ever he gives way to despondency, he quickly recovers himself, and flings his troubles to the wind. He does not grieve over losses which cannot be repaired, but casts about for new expedients and begins afresh. An admirable dispo-

sition, you will say, and a sure pledge of ultimate success! No, not always. One may be too hopeful, to reckon with the trials and difficulties which he will have to face, or to prepare himself betimes for the stern realities of life. And nothing is more fatal, either in worldly or in spiritual affairs. For trials and difficulties, as storms on a sultry day, are wont to arise in the most unlikely quarters, and quite overwhelm those who have not taken the precaution to protect themselves from them. Thus it often happens, that a life, which began with the brightest promises, ends in utter discomfiture and despair.

It is evident, therefore, that within certain bounds all these varieties of temperament have their advantages and their uses. Not all, it is true, are equally congenial or sympathetic. Yet it not unfrequently happens, that those which are most dissimilar, feel instinctively drawn towards each other. The reason is, that they mutually supplement and complete each other, and hence, like the opposite poles of an electric battery, attract each other.

Whatever may be a person's natural temperament, it has a definite place in the economy of creation, and is meant to subserve, in its own way, the designs of Providence. What climate is in the material world, that temperament is in the spiritual world. As the former accounts for the great variety of flowers and fruits, which charms the eye and gratifies the palate,

so the latter accounts for the great variety of tastes and talents, which leads men to choose and pursue different callings in life. Were it not for this, our course through life would be scarcely less dull and uninteresting than a journey across a boundless reach of open prairie-land, without so much as a streamlet or a gorge, a precipice or a ravine, a clump of trees or even a jutting rock, to break the dead monotony of the scene. After all, there is much wisdom in the homely old saying, that "variety is the spice of life." Sameness palls upon the mind, no less than upon the senses.

It is no mark of wisdom, then, to see nothing to admire in the idiosyncrasies of individuals, or in the peculiar temper of races and nations different from our own. For they all contribute to the variety and harmony, the grandeur and beauty of the moral universe. God has willed different persons and peoples to be mutually dependent and, in a sense, debtors to one another. On this account, He has so distributed his gifts, that none shall be able to boast of having inherited all that is good in human nature, or of being sufficient for themselves. "We can not all of us do everything."[1]

What we may desire and endeavor to acquire for ourselves, is a combination of the good qualities of other persons and peoples, so far as they are not contra-

[1] "Non omnia possumus omnes."

dictory, or mutually exclusive of each other: the energy and determination of the choleric, the tenderness and sympathy of the melancholic, the self-control and constancy of the phlegmatic, the delicacy and gentle manners of the nervous, the light-heartedness and vivacity of the sanguine. The outcome will be the noblest specimen of manhood — a perfect character.

LESSON XVI.

Formation of character — Replacing the imperfections of the natural temperament by the opposite perfections — Influence of the Supernatural.

Brute animals, writes the Angelic Doctor, are naturally disposed, by reason of their complexion or habit of body, to go to great extremes in one passion or another — the lion in daring, the dog in anger, the hare in fear. Man, on the other hand, considered specifically, in so far as he is a human being, has a bodily complexion or temperament, which is less prone to excess in any particular passion.[1] In other words, his bodily complexion is such, that his passions are naturally better balanced than those of irrational animals.

If now we compare man with man, we find, even in the state of fallen nature, some favored individuals who, almost from the cradle, closely approach the perfect ideal of the human species.[2] Their bodily

[1] This passage was copied, almost *verbatim*, from the works of St. Thomas Aquinas; but, having lost the reference, the writer is at present unable to verify the quotation.

[2] Such was St. John Berchmans, at least in the opinion of Father Cepari, his spiritual director and biographer.

complexion or temperament is so admirably adapted to aid the soul in its spiritual functions, that, to borrow the language of the Church, they seem scarcely to know that they have bodies of flesh, until they lay them down in death. And their natural character, which corresponds to their temperament, is, as a rule, so fully in accord with the law of right reason, and consequently the practice of virtue is comparatively so easy to them, that we may apply to them, in some sense, the words of St. Paul: "They do naturally the things which are of the law."[1]

But this is not the ordinary condition of mankind. On the contrary, many a one has to contend with a defective bodily temperament and a difficult natural character. And, what is worse, he is not always aware of it, or at least takes no heed of it in practice. He is irritable, fretful, peevish; and he blames the climate, or the occupation in which he is engaged. He is gloomy, sad, sullen; and he sets it down to the weather, or the solitude in which he is compelled to live. He undertakes many things and succeeds in nothing, so that people point to him and say, in scripture phrase, "this man began to build and could not finish;"[2] and he complains that fortune, so partial to some, is always cruel to him. He rarely takes

[1] Rom. II. 14. We say, "apply to them, in some sense, the words of St. Paul," because the literal meaning of the Apostle's words is somewhat different.

[2] Luke XIV. 30.

notice of others or thinks of doing a good turn for them; and yet he wonders, how it is that he has no friends and finds no sympathy upon earth. He cannot live in peace with his fellow-men; but he is convinced, that it is all their fault. They are so unreasonable, he says, that they would wear out the patience of Job. What wonder, then, that he should feel provoked? They are all in a conspiracy against him, because they will not see things as he sees them. He is right, of course; and, therefore, they are all wrong. In fact, the whole world, physical as well as moral, is strangely out of joint. He would like to set it right; but it will not allow itself to be set right. How, then, can he help being at cross-purposes with it?

Hallucinations of a distempered mind! It is not the outer world, but the medium through which he sees it, that is at fault. It is not the conduct of others, but his own natural disposition, that needs to be reformed. Until he recognizes this fact, he hopes in vain to enjoy interior peace, or to make real progress in virtue. Natural temperament, with all its weakness and imperfections, is a factor that we must necessarily take into account, under pain of the gravest mistakes and disappointments in the spiritual life. It is the temper of the instrument, with which we have to carve out our destiny in time and in eternity. We must take it, such as it is, and make the most of it.

"We have certain inclinations, called imperfections," says St. Francis de Sales, "which are neither sins nor effects of our own sins. Examples in point may be found in persons, who are by nature of a self-willed, headstrong, choleric, melancholic, frivolous or effeminate disposition. In fact, there is scarcely any one, in whom some such imperfections may not be remarked. They are natural. Nevertheless, by striving to acquire the opposite perfections, we may check and diminish those inclinations; we may even free ourselves altogether from them. O, how many Saints there are, who, by means of constant self-denial, changed their naturally choleric temperament into a meek one! As there is no natural disposition so good, that it may not be spoiled by vicious habits, so likewise is there none so bad, that it may not be improved by persevering efforts, aided by the grace of God." [1]

The Saint here mentions only persevering efforts, as a means to improve our natural disposition. And rightly so. There is, however, a great variety of causes, some of them purely physical, which may have an influence upon it, for better or for worse. Time, climate, occupation, good and ill health, the example of those with whom we live — all these concur to modify or to develop it. Childhood usually

[1] "The Duties of a Christian Life" — Extracts from the Writings of St. Francis de Sales, by Father James Brucker, S. J. Book V. Chap. VII.

brings out the sanguine temperament, as youth brings out the choleric, manhood the melancholic, and old age the phlegmatic. Long, dreary winters and dismal, leaden skies chill the blood and make it sluggish in the veins. Years of unremitting drudgery diminish the vigor and energy of the mind, as well as the suppleness and elasticity of the limbs. A life which knows no surcease of sorrow, not only writes its record upon the furrowed brow, but stamps it deeply upon the aching heart. A sudden shock which strains the nerves to the snapping point, often leaves them slack and irritable for life. Daily converse with the light and giddy tends to unbalance the soberest minds.

All these and similar influences it is our duty, as far as possible, to control, to counteract and to turn to profit, until, by long-continued practice, we have acquired habits of virtue which make us, in some sort, independent of them. Herein consists the formation of character, which is not the effect of chance, but of conscious and persevering efforts to perfect our natural temperament.

For this purpose, it is necessary, before all else, to keep the mind's eye steadily fixed upon the ideal that we wish to attain, and endeavor, on all occasions, to shape our conduct in accordance with it. Or, to apply the words of St. Francis de Sales, it is necessary to free ourselves from our natural imperfections,

and to replace them by the opposite perfections. But, while doing this, we must be on our guard not to suppress, or to crush out, what there is of good in the temperament which God has given us. On the contrary, we must foster and develop it to the best of our power, "training all the energies and capacities of our being to the highest pitch, and directing them to their true ends."

Observe the patient and industrious husbandman at his work! He lops off the exuberance of vegetation; he prunes and trains the wandering vine; he does not root it up and cast it into the fire. He stimulates the slow or imperfect growth of plants; "he digs about" the barren fig-tree and enriches its soil;[1] he does not cut it down, until he has in vain exhausted all his skill. By dint of careful culture, he succeeds in improving the nature of his fields and the quality of his crops. By slow degrees, he transforms the sandy waste into a smiling garden, and makes it yield an abundance of luscious fruits. Just so patience and industry, in the cultivation of character, are wont to produce the happiest results, even when the natural disposition is far from promising.

There is the lusty, muscular young lad who has shown, almost from infancy, a disposition to carry matters with a high hand. He began early to hector his little brothers, sisters and companions, without

[1] Luke, XIII. 8.

regard to their rights or their feelings. He laid down the law for their games and enforced it, after the manner of an absolute monarch; they had nothing to do, but to obey the arbitrary will of their self-appointed master. He now attempts to lord it over the domestics and the older members of the family. Ere long, if allowed to have his way, he will be the tyrant of the household, and later the terror and the scourge of mankind.

Curb that masterful young spirit, as soon as it manifests itself. Make it amenable to law, pliant to duty, submissive to authority, docile to teachers, deferential to the aged, considerate to the weak. Train it, shape it, bend it; but do not suppress it, crush it, break it. It is not wholly vicious. It contains some elements of good, which must not be lightly sacrificed or suffered to go to waste — a heart that is both stout and true, a resolute will and a steady purpose — the natural foundation of strong and sterling virtue, which stands unmoved, as a rock in the sea, amid the winds and waves of passion and persecution, that beat and break against it.

There is the frail, delicate little child — different, in almost every respect, from the preceding — a bundle of nerves, which vibrate uneasily to the slightest impression from without. Its sensitive nature is at a sad disadvantage in the struggle for life. It rarely does itself justice, rarely asserts itself or shows what it is

able to do. It is too timid to remain alone, too bashful to appear in public. It shrinks from meeting its elders, or even children of its own age that it does not know. A word or a look of disapproval wounds it to the quick, and causes it to burst into tears — the only response which it has, to the injuries that are heaped upon it.

If you chide it, when through shyness it fails to meet your expectation, or allow it to be bullied and pushed aside by its bolder, ruder companions, you will not only embitter its young life at present, but you will most probably blight its prospects for the future. If, on the contrary, you show yourself pleased with its efforts, however unsuccessful they may be, and always take sides with it against its persecutors, you will discover, under that tiny little form, graces of mind and heart which you did not suspect, and will help to build up one of those gentle, refined, noble characters, whose presence upon earth is a perpetual instruction on the dignity of human nature.

There is the boy or girl — so unlike others of the same age — who has none of the gayety or playfulness of childhood; who takes no pleasure in its innocent sports and games, nor indeed in anything else; who seems, in fact, to be weary of life, before having fairly entered upon it. A rare specimen of childhood, surely! Would it were much rarer still! That healthy children, who have never yet tasted the bitter cup

of human misery, should habitually sigh and moan, or brood and mope, seems so unnatural that the watchful parent or teacher takes alarm, and asks himself anxiously: What can be the matter? Why do not those children return my smile of affection, as they used to do? Why do their lack-lustre eyes refuse to meet mine? Why that darkening brow and gloomy look?

Such children are usually of a gentle, affectionate disposition. But there enters into their composition a touch of sentimentality, of dreaminess and languor, which arouses suspicion. Cultivate that gentle, affectionate disposition; it will be an excellent trait in their character. But, unless you wish them to become the victims of precocious vice, or to develop into soft, nerveless, lackadaisical characters, that will waste their lives in alternate fits of melancholy and of maudlin sentimentality, beware of fondling, petting, dandling them, particularly if they crave for your especial sympathy or attention. Let your affection for them show itself in a hardy, vigorous treatment, alone capable of developing in them a robust, manly character, which will be their best natural preservative from melancholy as well as from sin.

There is the lively, mercurial youth, blithe as a bird, and frisky as a kid, in early spring. He is too light and giddy to think, too restless to apply himself seriously to anything whatever. Fickle and unequal,

he leaves you in doubt whether he is a genius or a simpleton. At one time he astonishes you by the brilliancy of his answers; at another he makes you despair of ever teaching him anything. His knowledge seems to come to him by intuition. It bursts forth suddenly, as a spark from flint, when it is struck; it scintillates for a moment; then vanishes, as quickly and mysteriously as it appeared.

If he grows up such as he is, there is great reason to fear, that he will fritter away his youth in childish trifles; that gradually he will develop all the oddities of that peculiar sort of human being, popularly known as "a genius;" that, similar to "a rolling stone which gathers no moss," he will remain, all through life, too unsteady to turn to profit the gifts of nature which he possesses. There is but one hope. You must speak to his conscience, impress him with a deep sense of responsibility, teach him to be thoughtful and earnest, confine his superfluous activity within bounds, and direct it into the right channel. Properly guided, refined and softened by the practice of virtue, his easy good-nature and bright, radiant disposition will win for him the love and veneration of men, and will make them better by making them happier.

There is the serious boy, who displays a maturity of judgment quite beyond his years — a child in age and size, a man in word and deed — a youthful philo-

sopher, who moralizes as a sage and acts as a stoic. To judge by appearances, he is not conscious of possessing any faculties, besides memory and understanding; or, at least, he rarely uses them to advantage. He plods slowly along the beaten track, quite content to be outstripped by others of inferior merit, in the race of life. He toils and moils, to lay up stores of knowledge, which others will appropriate to themselves. He has talent and industry, but he gives little evidence of spirit and energy.

Make him aware of his latent resources; it will be like opening to him a new world, whose existence he little suspected. Arouse his dormant imagination, stimulate all his energies into action; it will be like sending an electric current through his whole being, imparting a vigor and an animation, of which you thought him incapable. At the same time, remember that it is his sedate and sober judgment, upon which you must chiefly build your hopes. It is a precious gift, for which nothing else in the purely natural order can compensate. Cultivate it, then, to the utmost and strengthen it more and more, at the same time that you endeavor to develop all his other faculties. He will be one of those even-tempered men, that never allow passion or imagination to "take reason prisoner;" one of those stable characters, that make up the conservative element of human society; one of those law-abiding citizens, that constitute the strength and support of the state.

In all cases, as is manifest, the formation of character must begin by restraining the excesses, supplying the deficiences, and developing the good qualities of the natural temperament. In this manner, habits are gradually acquired, by which the natural imperfections are removed; the senses are disciplined, the passions repressed; the imagination is controlled, the intellect enlightened, the will strengthened. In brief, all the faculties, while preserving their natural activity, are so balanced and coördinated, that they mutually aid one another and conspire harmoniously towards a common end; the lower, confined within due limits, obey without contradiction the impulse given them by the higher, and leave the rational man full master of himself and his actions. The result is a formation of character, conformable in all respects to the conditions of human nature.

Man is neither all spirit nor all matter, neither all intellect nor all feeling. He is a compound being, endowed with manifold faculties and energies, essential to its existence; and enriched with a thousand gifts and qualities, necessary for its well-being. He is a complex piece of mechanism, whose parts are so delicately adjusted, and fitted each to each, that the slightest disproportion or want of balance in any one of them disturbs the regular action of all the rest. His reason should preside, as a sovereign, over his other faculties, to guide and direct them; it should

not attempt to suppress or displace them. It cannot do without them; indeed, it is so dependent upon them, that at times it appears to be wholly at their mercy. If they have been well trained, they are loyal and obedient to their sovereign; if not, they rebel and try to make a slave of it. How often, for a fact, is reason blinded by the passions! How often is it led astray by the imagination! How often, on the other hand, when it has lost itself in its own speculations, is it brought back from its wanderings by the nobler instincts of the heart! Strange as it may sound, the well-trained heart is a safer and truer gide than the head which trusts in its own conceit. But neither the heart nor the head is all-sufficient for itself.

Some men are said to be "all heart," others "all head." Is it praise or is it blame? It may be either the one or the other. Taken in the strictest sense, these expressions imply that one faculty or quality, proper to man, preponderates to such an extent over all the others, that they disappear before it or are absorbed by it; and this is an imperfection, ruinous to character. Taken in a broader sense, they signify that, though every faculty and quality, proper to man, has been normally developed, still one is particularly prominent; and this is a perfection, which gives the keynote to a person's character. Between these two cases there is all the difference, that there is between a specialist in medicine who has confined his

studies to one class of diseases, and another who, besides possessing a good knowledge of general pathology, has given more than ordinary attention to the affections of some particular organ, such as the eye, the ear or the heart. As a skilful physician, who devotes himself in a special manner to one branch of his profession, is generally more competent than others to treat certain forms of disease, so a well-balanced character, distinguished by some strongly marked trait, is apt to be better suited than others to fill certain positions in the world. There is, therefore, a decided advantage to human society in a variety of characters, with distinctive excellences which it would be difficult, not to say impossible, ever to find combined in the same individual.

Hence it is clear, what must be the qualities of a sound education, whose principal function is to fit a person for his lifework, by the formation of his character.

In the first place, education which is worthy of the name, must expand all the human faculties with all their activities and properties. Even the ordinary branches of learning must be directed towards that end. They must be such as will improve the memory, discipline the understanding, refine the feelings, cultivate the taste, form the manners. It was this that the ancients meant to express by the word "humanities," which was their equivalent for liberal edu-

cation or culture; because they conceived education to consist in the full and harmonious development of all that is distinctively human in man. Education, therefore, must not be onesided; for a onesided education is incapable of producing such a result, and consequently of forming the character.

Whether more or less stress is to be laid upon any particular study, will depend upon the pupil's present development and, with due reserve, also upon the special needs of the life to which he is destined. And these needs, be it remembered, are not to be estimated solely by the requisites to success in the profession of his choice, but quite as much by the peculiar dangers to which it exposes him. A youth, for example, who is to devote his maturer years to the exact sciences or to philosophical speculations, may not need the amenities of literature, to become eminent in his own profession; but he may need them very much, to counteract its tendency to dry up the fountains of the affections and the emotions.

In the second place, since "character comprises the whole sphere of the educated will and stands for the sum of the ethical traits which give each one his moral indiduality," it is plain that education must aim especially to cultivate the will, and to develop the moral and religious side of human nature. With this object in view, it must never weary of inculcating correct principles of morality, until they have

penetrated so deeply into the pupil's mind, that they have, so to speak, become a part of it. It must confirm its lessons, by the frequent presentation of models, calculated to win his admiration, and move him to emulate their example. It must, above all, insist upon his making persevering efforts to acquire virtuous habits, which shall supply his natural defects of character, and make it a second nature for him to conform his life to his own principles of conduct.

Finally, in order to build up character, education must avail itself of the supernatural aids of religion. The natural, abandoned to itself, is morally incapable of realizing its own ideals and attaining the highest perfection in its own order. Happily the supernatural comes to its assistance. It lays down the sublimest principles, proposes the noblest models, and urges the strongest motives for persevering efforts. What is more, it takes the natural man by the hand, lifts him up to a higher plane and, imparting new light to his undertanding and new strength to his will, enables him to see and to do at all times what is most becoming. And this is the perfection of character.

Thus it happens that among the Saints of God, whose lives appeared to be wholly dominated by the idea of the supernatural, we often find the sweetest and most perfect natural characters — "beloved of God and men, whose memory is in benediction." [1]

[1] Ecclus. XLV. 1.

LESSON XVII.

Restlessness, a great obstacle to the formation of character — Kinds and causes of restlessness — Remedies.

The principal obstacle to the formation of a staunch and reliable character, and to the acquisition of solid Christian virtue, is habitual restlessness of spirit.

"Next to sin," says St. Francis de Sales, "restlessness is the greatest evil that can befall the soul." It is not a simple temptation, but a never-failing source of countless temptations. It has the same effect upon the soul, as chronic revolution and sedition have upon a nation. And what could be more fatal or disastrous to its spiritual interests? A country which is always in the throes of civil war, or disturbed by the factious uprisings of its own citizens, so far from developing its natural resources, is apt to exhaust them by degrees, and to lay itself open to the attacks of foreign enemies, who will endeavor to profit by the distracted condition of its internal affairs. So, too, a man who is a constant prey to interior worry, or agitated by the turbulent workings of his own mind, instead of growing in virtue, is in danger of losing what he possesses, and of becoming the sport of the evil one, who will seize the opportunity to "fish in the troubled waters." [1]

[1] "Introduction to a Devout Life," Part IV. chapt. XI.

Now, who that has any knowledge of the world, can fail to see that the spirit of restlessness is abroad among us? The very excellences and advantages of modern life — and we are far from wishing to undervalue them — tend to foster and develop it. The distinguishing characteristic of the age is an incessant display of energy, activity and power, especially in the material order. So that, accepting the prevalent theory which explains every kind of force as a mode of motion, one might well define the present age, as the age of perpetual motion, Most of us fall more or less under the spell; for, even in spite of ourselves, we are the children of the age.

We are forever in motion. And, to a certain extent, it is well for us; because life is motion. The danger lies in the excess or the abuse of what, in itself, is good, and this danger is always imminent. Whirled along with a velocity which it is difficult for us to moderate, we may meet with a fatal accident, a collision or a plunge over an embankment, when we least expect it. — We are forever in motion. The struggle to advance is intense in every department of human activity. The watchword of all is "forward." In the strain to overtake or to distance their rivals, many overdo themselves, and are compelled to fall out of the race before it is fairly opened. — We are forever in motion. Discontented with everything that has been done before, men hasten to break away from

the traditions of the past. Yet, with singular inconsistency, they often return, by a different route, to the starting-point; and all the while they flatter themselves, that they are moving rapidly forward. — We are forever in motion. Progress is the great object of our ambition; and progress for the majority of mankind means little more than a perpetual succession of changes. They are happy, when they are able to bring about a change in the existing condition of things, even though it be the change of dissolution and destruction. Like children, they quickly tire of their toys and take them to pieces; whereupon they look for others, which they may treat in the same manner.

In short, the public mind is in a state of periodic fermentation. There is nothing fixed, nothing secure, nothing permanent in human thought, human conduct, human institutions. The first principles of reason, the simplest notions of morality, the very foundations of society seem to have been shaken. And, as a consequence, a feeling of uneasiness and restlessness has come over the world at large.

This feeling, as directors of souls know but too well, has its counterpart in the spiritual life. It is one of the most common, as well as most troublesome, spiritual ailments of our days. Those who are afflicted with it, are not moved by reason and principle, but by impulse and impression. At times it is due to

purely accidental causes, such as an unusual amount of occupation, physical indisposition, or great and unexpected trials; and then it may be simply a passing affection, which does no serious harm to the soul. But frequently there is in a person's bodily temperament a natural predisposition to restlessness, which, if not checked betimes, is aggravated by the peculiar habits of modern life, until it becomes a dangerous spiritual malady. It takes two very different forms, corresponding to two different kinds of natural disposition. In one case, the characteristic symptom is pusillanimity; in another, on the contrary, it is presumption. The former shows itself chiefly in a person's private, religious life; the latter in his public, social life.[1]

Is a man naturally nervous or irritable? Is he sensitive and timid? Is he anxious and apprehensive of evil? Is he too soft of heart, to endure the buffets of fortune and bear up under the vicissitudes of life? If so, his constitutional infirmity is likely to be much increased by the continual tension, to which the nervous system is at present subjected. As he grows older, he is likely to grow more fretful and impatient, more uneasy and solicitous, more diffident and despondent.

[1] The reason is, that pusillanimity seeks to hide in the shade of privacy, while presumption courts the light of publicity. In reality, however, both pusillanimity and presumption affect all one's doings, private and public.

Forgetting the counsel of our Divine Lord, "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," he foresees all sorts of possible and impossible difficulties in every undertaking. Shall he venture upon it? Or shall he not? He is irresolute and undecided. He thinks, that he will. And again he thinks, that he will not. He changes his mind a hundred times, before coming to a conclusion. And, if at last he resolves to "dare and do," it is amid a flutter of excitement, which betrays itself in all his movements. He frets, he fidgets, he worries about everything. Is he required to do anything out of the common? anything which interferes ever so little with the routine of his daily work? He is as much troubled as Martha was, when she set about preparing a meal for her heavenly guest; and like her, he communicates his trouble to those about him. Even if he does not importune them for help, he disturbs their quiet and tries their patience in a thousand other ways, which will never be recorded.

To complicate matters the more, his natural anxiety is not unfrequently accompanied by a most vexatious form of scrupulosity, which has its root in nervousness, and which seems to be greatly on the increase in our times. And thus moral causes combine with physical, to keep him in a state of perpetual mental agitation. Just at the critical moment of action, his treacherous imagination plays him false, and conjures up a grisly host of doubts and fears, which quite

unman him. He begins to reconsider his previous decision, he vacillates, he changes his mind. He has the purest of motives, the strongest reasons to act; but he has not the courage of his convictions. He has the soundest of principles; but he dares not apply them to himself.[1]

He is always troubled: troubled because he is subject to so many imperfections, troubled because he is making so little progress in virtue; troubled because he finds no matter for confession, troubled because he finds so much; troubled because he does not know how to begin his self-accusation, troubled because he does not know how to end it; troubled because he is in spiritual darkness, troubled because he has an occasional ray of light; troubled because he has so many troubles, troubled because he has so few. If he has no troubles, he makes them for himself or borrows them from others. As a consequence, his brain is always racked with useless thoughts, his heart is wrung with groundless fears, his soul is filled with foolish cares. His disturbed conscience makes a moral coward of him, and unfits him for a life of unselfish, generous, heroic devotion to the service of God.

Is a man naturally sanguine or choleric? Is he bold and self-asserting? Is he energetic and aggressive?

[1] That scrupulosity, at least in some of its most troublesome forms, has increased in our days — probably owing to physical conditions — seems to be beyond dispute. See "L'Ange Conducteur des Ames Scrupuleuses," Preface.

Is he fond of enterprise and adventure? If so, he is very much exposed to be wrought upon by the spirit of the age, so congenial to his own disposition.

If he yields to his natural inclination, he throws himself with ardor into the full current of modern life, determined to keep abreast of his fellowmen, or, if possible, to take the lead and draw them after him. He is restive and impatient of drones and laggards, who are unable or unwilling to follow him in his headlong rush; because he believes that most of the evils in this world are caused by stagnation and inaction, and that the remedy is to be found in continual stirring and activity.

He is usually at a white heat of excitement, which he does his best to communicate to all that he can bring within the sphere of his influence. To accomplish his object the more readily, he announces himself with a flourish of trumpets and a flaunting of banners, calculated to arouse in others the proper degree of attention and enthusiasm. He affects the novel, the startling, the sensational, the dramatic, in his words and actions, which he adapts with much cleverness to the demands of the varying hour.

He is an opportunist, a diplomat, always disposed to stretch a point and make a compromise; to blink at facts and flout at principles, prejudicial to the cause which he represents. If he has ever expressed any views, which seem to run counter to the popular

taste, he is careful to explain them away, and chameleonlike to take the color of his surroundings. His personal conduct is variable, and difficult to qualify. In practice, if not in theory, he agrees with the eccentric philosopher who wrote: "With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do . . . . Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said to-day."[1]

There can be no doubt, that he speaks in hard words what he thinks, and that to-morrow he often contradicts what he said to-day. Hence he has great power with the fickle crowd, which makes more account of boldness and novelty than of argument and consistency. It is a "power," not "unto edification," but "unto destruction;"[2] a power like that of the volcano, the earthquake, the cyclone, the avalanche or the mountain torrent; a power like that of nature in a state of commotion.

As a matter of fact, he is almost habitually in a state of commotion. He does everything at a high pressure, and with a vehemence which bears down opposition. He levels to the ground, with reckless haste, what others have built up with the labor of years. Nothing done heretofore is satisfactory to him. He knows so much more, and can do everything so much better, than his predecessors! If men will only

[1] Emerson, Letter to Mr. Ware.
[2] II. Cor. X. 8.

listen to him and accept his brilliant theories of reform, the face of the earth will soon be renewed, and put on the freshness and vigor of second youth! Without being aware of it, he is sowing the seeds of revolution; and the fruit is disturbance, destruction and devastation of all that was held most sacred in the past. He has energy; but it is not tempered with prudence. He has zeal; but it is "not according to knowledge."[1] He has strength of will; but it lacks the supernatural element, without which all human efforts end in spiritual ruin. He is "not of the seed of those men, by whom salvation was brought to Israel."[2] The spirit of God does not ally itself to the spirit of restlessness and disturbance. "Behold the Lord passeth," said a heavenly voice to Elias, "behold the Lord passeth, and a great and strong wind before the Lord, overthrowing the mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces: the Lord is not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake; the Lord is not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire: the Lord is not in the fire."[3]

Whatever the particular form which restlessness assumes, it "springs," says St. Francis de Sales, "from an inordinate desire to be delivered from some evil that we feel, or to obtain some good that we look for; though, in reality, nothing tends more than rest-

[1] Rom. X. 2.
[2] I. Mach. V. 62.
[3] III. Kings, XIX. 11, 12.

lessness and anxiety, to aggravate that evil and to remove that good beyond our reach. When birds, caught in the fowler's snare, begin to struggle and to beat their wings, they entangle themselves more and more in the meshes. Take care not to imitate their example. When you are impelled by the desire to free yourself from some evil or to possess yourself of some good, endeavor, in the first place, to preserve your soul in peace. Set your mind and heart at rest, choose the means best adapted to your end, and pursue it with the utmost tranquillity — I say tranquillity and not sluggishness — without anxiety, without worry, without agitation. Else, instead of attaining the object of your desires, you will embroil yourself all the more and destroy your chances of success. 'O Lord,' said David, 'my soul is continually in my hands: and I have not forgotten thy law.'[1] Examine yourself frequently, or at least in the morning and again at night, to see whether you hold your soul securely in your hands, or whether you have let the spirit of restlessness snatch it from you. Reflect whether your heart is under your control, or whether it has escaped from you, to follow its unruly passions of love, hatred, envy, greed, fear, sadness, joy."[2]

Let us all take to heart this excellent advice; and, especially, let us be on our guard against the two extremes of pusillanimity and presumption. Let us

[1] Psalm CXVIII. 109.

[2] "Introd. to a Devout Life," as above.

be ready to recognize the limitations of human nature, and neither allow ourselves to be discouraged by them, nor refuse to submit to them. Let us strive, with all the energy of our souls, for what is highest, noblest, best in life. In spiritual matters, as in everything else, let our motto be "Excelsior." But let us not look too much to outward appearances, nor easily take credit to ourselves for the visible fruits of our labors. Let us not hope to scale the heights of sanctity in a day, nor strain after what is strange and startling in devotion.[1] In this age of perpetual changes and innovations, whatever savors of novelty in the spiritual life is open to suspicion, and must not be adopted, until it has stood the test of reason and religion. "Believe not every spirit," writes the Beloved Disciple, "but try the spirits if they be of God." [2]

Let us not permit ourselves to be swayed by the fluctuations of public opinion, or induced by the artful representations of those who create it, to embark in new and untried ventures, whether it be in the spiritual or in the material order. Speculation is as hazardous in religious as in commercial transactions. In both cases, it generally leads to failure and dis-

[1] While the Church encourages solid devotions, founded on the dogmas of faith, she condemns, in the strongest terms, those spurious and superstitious devotions which spring up, from time to time, without her sanction. Many such have fallen under her ban within the last few years.

[2] I. John. IV. 1.

aster. Let us rather follow the old and approved methods, recommended by experience and the example of the Saints. There is a legitimate trade, quite independent of the gambling done on 'Change. It is this that our Lord recommends in the Gospel, when He says: "Trade till I come."[1] It is this, and only this, that can build up a fortune which will last and grow with time. "Substance got in haste shall be diminished," says the Holy Ghost, "but that which by little and little is gathered with the hand, shall increase."[2]

According to the ordinary laws of God's providence, the growth of the individual soul in grace and merit, as well as the social and religious improvement of men in general, is not the work of an instant. It is gradual as the growth of a tree, constant as the work of God Himself in nature. It demands long and persistent efforts. It requires us to rise superior to the vicissitudes of time, and, while everything within and without is forever in motion, to keep the mind's eye as steadily turned towards God, as the needle of the compass is turned towards the North Pole. "As long as thou livest," writes Thomas à Kempis, "thou art subject to change, even against thy will: so that at one time thou feelest joyful, at another sad; at one time easy, at another troubled; now fervent, now cold; now sprightly, now sluggish;

[1] Luke, XIX. 13.
[2] Prov. XIII. 11.

now grave, now light. But he that is wise, and well instructed in spirit, stands above all these changes; and no matter what he experiences within himself, or on what side the wind of mutability blows, he takes care to keep the intention of his soul always directed towards its proper and wished-for end."[1]

[1] Im. Chr. B. III. C. 33.

LESSON XVIII.

Energy, an important element in the spiritual life.— It must show itself in the promptness, constancy, devotedness and generosity with which we serve God.

As we must be on our guard not to be carried away by the spirit of restlessness, so, on the other hand, must we be careful not to settle down into a state of torpor. For that, too, is a source of danger to many, more particularly to persons of a phlegmatic or of a melancholic temperament.

There are those, to whom it seems morally impossible to make a serious effort. They are afflicted with a constitutional lethargy, from which they are hardly ever fully aroused, except by some sudden and unexpected shock; and to that they are but little exposed. Free from violent passions, they do not experience the grosser temptations, by which many others are beset. Hence, as a rule, they lead fairly virtuous lives, and comply with the essential obligations of religion; but they can scarcely be called fervent or model Christians. They faithfully pursue the even tenor of their way; but they cannot be induced to quicken their slow and languid gait, much less to "run the way of the" divine "commandments."[1]

[1] Psalm CXVIII. 32.

It is, however, in public life and in their dealings with others, that they are most likely to show their lack of activity. What little energy they possess, they exhaust upon purely secular affairs; so that they have none left for religious interests. They never appear as representative Catholics, nor take an active part in Catholic movements. For aught they do to advance the good cause, they might as well be stricken off the roll of church-members; because they raise neither hand nor voice, to defend or strengthen the Catholic position. On the contrary, by their general apathy and want of public spirit, they cool the ardor of more earnest men and embolden their adversaries. They have a thousand reasons to justify their conduct, and to make their supineness pass for virtue. They are so adverse to contention — meek lambs that they are! — that they would rather endure oppression, than offer the least resistance. They agree with the old philosopher that "peace, obtained even upon the most unfavorable terms, is to be preferred to war, waged for the best of causes."[1] They are eloquent in counselling others, to be prudent and moderate in demanding their rights and repelling aggression. "Let well enough alone," they say; "let us be thankful for what we have, we might fare much worse;" "don't arouse opposition;" "don't irritate the public mind;" "don't disquiet the consciences of men who

[1] "Iniquissimam pacem anteponendam esse justissimo bello."

are in good faith;" "don't drive them to extremes;" "meet them halfway and win them over by concessions." Excellent aphorisms, containing many half-truths and very useful when properly understood, but altogether inapplicable to existing circumstances!

There are others who, though not wanting in natural energy, are appalled by the difficulties which confront them on all sides. They look into themselves. After years of struggle — so it appears to them — they are no better than at the start! They are still subject to innumerable imperfections! They are daily relapsing into the same failings! What's the use of making any more efforts? They are tired and discouraged! They can go no further! Like way-worn travellers, they cast themselves down by the roadside, and abandon themselves to a mild form of despair.

They look outside of themselves. The world — as they see it — is becoming worse every day! It is evidently hastening towards its final doom! The days of antichrist cannot be far off! All the powers of evil are leagued together for an onslaught! They have everything in their own hands and are controlling everything! We cannot cope with them! They resort to dark and devious ways, into which conscience forbids us to follow! What's the use of making any more efforts? We are contending against desperate odds and can hold out no longer! There is no hope for modern society! — This is the language of many good souls,

who dwell with morbid satisfaction upon the degeneracy of the age and, despite the warning of the Holy Ghost, continue forever asking, "what thinkest thou is the cause that former times were better than they are now?"[1] Their gloomy reflections — strange as it may seem — are a cordial to soothe their troubled spirits. They induce a drowsiness and dreaminess, which communicate themselves by degrees to the entire community, until there ensues an almost complete stagnation of Catholic activities. Instead of bracing up for vigorous action, men fold their arms and, like the children of Israel "beside the rivers of Babylon," sit and weep over the olden days which are gone, to return no more.[2]

Such a state of mind — it is hardly necessary to say — is utterly incompatible with the practice of a healthy spirituality. For the practice of spirituality necessarily implies continual effort and exertion; and hence it is also called asceticism, that is, according to the literal acceptation of the word, exercise. In the same manner and on the same account, as St. Ignatius remarks, the various spiritual duties, usually performed in time of Retreat, are called Spiritual Exercises; because, just as to take a walk, to make a journey and to run, are bodily exercises, so also to pray vocally or mentally, to examine one's conscience

[1] Ecclesiastes, VII. 11.
[2] Psalm CXXXVI. 1.

and to perform other similar operations, are spiritual exercises. They all demand effort and exertion.[1]

This idea, so clearly put before us by the Saint on the very threshold of the Retreat, is still more forcibly brought out later on, especially in that sublime meditation on the "Kingdom" or "Leadership of Christ," wherein all men are invited to imitate their heaven-appointed Leader in his labors and fatigues, in order that they may merit a share in his rewards.

In fact, the whole meditation inculcates the necessity of energy and incites to vigorous action. More than this. There breathes throughout a martial spirit, calculated to fire the soul with genuine ardor for valiant deeds. And rightly so; because this is the spirit which must animate every earnest Christian. Even the child, when it is anointed with chrism in Confirmation, is already consecrated "a soldier of Christ;" and a soldier it must be all the days of its life.

The Church of Christ upon earth is necessarily the Church Militant; it must, therefore, of its very nature, be in a state of warfare. Christ, its Leader, is not only the "Prince of Peace," but also the "God of Hosts." While He promises interior peace of soul to men of good will, He declares to them most emphatically: "Do not think that I came to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but the sword."[2] Men may

[1] Annotation I.
[2] Matth. X. 34.

cry "peace, peace;" but there is no lasting peace here below for the soldiers of the Cross.[1] Much less is there freedom from labor and exertion. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," says our Lord, "and the violent bear it away."[2] As though He said: the kingdom of heaven is the prize of those ardent spirits who, brooking no opposition in the way of salvation, move on with irresistible force towards their goal.

The force of a body in motion, called momentum, is the resultant of its mass multiplied by its velocity. Even the largest body, moving with little velocity, has but an insignificant force, while the smallest body, moving with great velocity, has an enormous force. A cannon-ball, slowly rolled along the ground, is easily stopped by the hand of a child and remains a harmless plaything at its feet: a bullet, sped from the mouth of a rifle, passes through the body of a man and leaves him a lifeless corpse upon the field. What velocity is in the physical order, that energy is in the moral — an element which converts an inert mass into a mighty agent for good or for evil.

It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to have at our disposal a large reserve of energy, which we may call into service at a moment's notice and use as we like. For as, on the one hand, we must not allow ourselves to be swayed by blind impulse, so, on the

[1] Jer. VI. 14.
[2] Matth. XI. 12.

other hand, must we be always ready to throw ourselves with our whole soul, into whatever we undertake. We must be neither rash and precipitate, nor tardy and sluggish. Before acting, we must take counsel with reason; while acting, we must allow much play to the emotions. Once the will of God is clear to us, we must not hesitate or delay. "To-day if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts,"[1] exclaims the Psalmist. With Samuel we must say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;"[2] with St. Paul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?"[3] And when the divine behest has been communicated to us, we must hasten to execute it, because the "grace of the Holy Spirit allows of no tardy efforts."[4] Procrastination has the appearance of reluctance, and displeases the Almighty, who "loves a cheerful giver." Promptness, on the contrary, is an evidence of good will, and greatly enhances the value of an offering, in his eyes. For "whosoever gives promptly, doubles the value of his gift."[5]

Nor is it only as private individuals, but also as members of the great Catholic body, that we must be prompt and resolute to act. Catholics have inalienable, God-given rights, which they are bound to

[1] Psalm XCIV. 8.
[2] I. Kings, III. 9.
[3] Acts, IX. 6.
[4] "Nescit tarda molimina Sancti Spiritus gratia" — St. Ambrose, lib. 2 in Luc. 1.
[5] "Qui cito dat, bis dat."

guard and defend, as a soldier is bound to guard and defend the rights of his country. If they fail to do so, when they can, or, worse still, if they basely surrender them, they make themselves guilty of high treason against Christ, their Leader, to whom they have sworn eternal fealty and allegiance.

Now, it is a matter of personal experience as well as of history, that these rights, however indefeasible, are assailed by hosts of adversaries, who leave no means untried to deprive us of them. They are always at work, devising schemes and plots; and when they find us ever so little off our guard, they enter by stealth into God's "inheritance"[1] and take possession of it. What is worse, some of us seem to be unaware of their invasion or to close our eyes to their usurpation. We forget that we have rights, or fail to see that they are being violated; and, neglecting to claim them betimes, we often let them go by default. Surely, such dalliance is unpardonable in the soldiers of Christ, whose duty it is, in the words of St. Ignatius, "to bivouac by night and to fight by day."[2] In virtue of their profession and of the arms which they bear, they must be ever on the alert against surprises and quick to repel assaults. And if, overpowered by violence, they are sometimes compel-

[1] Psalm LXXVIII. 1.

[2] Meditation on the "Kingdom of Christ." The literal translation of the Latin text is, "to watch by night and to labor by day."

led to waive their claims and leave them in abeyance for the time being, they must not only guard, to the best of their power, against the appearance of having relinquished them, but must avail themselves of every occasion to assert them anew. "Strive for justice for thy soul," says the Holy Ghost, "and even unto death fight for justice, and God will overthrow thy enemies for thee."[1]

"Even unto death fight for justice." Mark the words! So long as we are in this world, our enemies, interior as well as exterior, will never give us much peace. But, provided we continue to fight manfully unto the end, God will overthrow them for us.

Our imperfections will cling to us till death; they are inseparable from our earthly condition. But they do not necessarily impede our spiritual progress. "O! how great is human frailty, which is always prone to vice," exclaims Thomas à Kempis. "To-day thou confessest thy sins, and to-morrow thou again comittest what thou hast confessed. Now thou resolvest to take care, and an hour later thou dost as if thou hadst never resolved."[2] Elsewhere the same author introduces our Lord, as saying to his disciple: "Thou art man and not God; thou art flesh and not an angel. How canst thou think to continue ever in the same state of virtue, when this was not found in the angels in heaven, nor in the first man in paradise? I am he

[1] Ecclus. IV. 33.
[2] B. I, C. 22. n. 6.

that raises up and saves them that mourn; and them that know their own infirmity I advance to my divinity."[1] Humiliating as are these words, they are nevertheless very consoling. For they teach us not to be discouraged, when we discover ourselves stumbling and falling, but to have patience with ourselves, even as God has patience with us; and that is a lesson, which we must all learn, if we hope to acquire a correct knowledge of the Science of the Saints.

"Let us not be disturbed, therefore, by our imperfections," writes St. Francis de Sales, "because our perfection consists in combating them."[2] Rather, let us take heart of grace, when we reflect that God, who knows the clay of which we are made, will not expect impossibilities from us. "All men have not alike to overcome and mortify," remarks Thomas à Kempis. "Yet he that is diligent and zealous, although he have more passions to fight against, will be able to make greater progress than another who has fewer passions, but is withal less fervent in the pursuit of virtue."[3] It is no wonder, that a lamb is always meek; but it is a wonder that a lion is ever tame. Neither is it any great merit, that a man of a gentle disposition always possesses his soul in peace; but it is great merit, that one of a naturally violent temper ever learns to control his anger. And the same dis-

[1] B. III. C. 57. n. 3.
[2] "Introd. to a Devout Life," P. I. 5.
[3] Im. Chr. B. I. C. 25. nn. 3, 4.

tinction must be made, in general, between such as have inherited, and such as have acquired, any virtuous inclination whatever. The former owe it to nature, the latter to personal effort; and merit is in proportion to the effort which we make, to coöperate with grace. Hence it is a received maxim in the spiritual life, that effort is always success, even when outward appearances point to nothing but failure. "For man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart."[1] When the actual result falls short of our expectations and of the strength which we have put forth, He takes the will for the deed and rewards us accordingly.

But if it is so difficult to gain a complete victory over oneself, is it not clear that it must be a long and tedious task to subjugate all the world to the law of Christ? If the Church of Christ upon earth is the Church Militant, is it not clear that she must continue to struggle and combat, until she shall be absorbed into the Church Triumphant in heaven? If the faithful are, by profession, the soldiers of Christ, is it not clear that they must be ready to bear arms all their lives? Why, then, should we be surprised or disheartened by the number and obstinacy of our enemies? They are active in the service of satan; let us be more active still in the service of Christ. They are persistent in the pursuit of evil; let us be more per-

[1] I. Kings, XVI. 7.

sistent still in the pursuit of good. They furnish us continual opportunities to display our loyalty and our prowess; let us not be slow to recognize those opportunities and to improve them.

Let us have a well-concerted plan of campaign, and carry it out faithfully and constantly unto the last. But let us not lose time in dispute about theories, and in discussions about ways and means, whose only result is, that all who take part in them abound the more in their own sense, without coming to any practical conclusion. Let us not exhaust our energy upon protests and manifestoes which, similar to artificial fireworks, go off with great noise, blaze up for a while, and end in smoke. Men, as a rule, know well enough what our principles are, or ought to be, even before we proclaim them. Often they are supremely indifferent to them, and contest them — if they deign to notice them at all — simply for the sake of gaining time for their own plans, or of dividing us upon minor issues, in which self-love has a much greater share than religion. But they are never indifferent to an intelligent and earnest Catholic public opinion, which knows what it wants, and shows itself determined to get it by means of a persevering, consistent, well-sustained course of action.

Such an opinion is a moral force with which, in our age, even the most unprincipled political parties, as well as the most unscrupulous tyrants, are com-

pelled to reckon and to which, as experience proves, they surrender at last, if not from a sense of justice, at least from motives of self-interest. Fewer words, therefore, and more actions! Fewer discussions and more facts! Vigorous actions, telling facts! This is the need of the hour, almost everywhere; this is the only argument, which many of our adversaries are able to appreciate. We must not, of course, resort to methods which the most delicate conscience does not fully approve. No end, however just, can justify a means which is in itself unjust; and "evil is not to be done, that good may come of it."[1] We must not encroach a hair's breadth upon the rights of others, however much they may have encroached or attempted to encroach upon ours. We must repose all our hope in the justice of our cause and the devotedness of its defenders.

As to the justice of our cause and its ultimate success there can be no doubt, since it is the cause of Christ Himself. He is strong enough by Himself to defend it against all its opponents. Yet He has willed to employ the instrumentality of his intelligent creatures, making the fate of individuals and, to an extent, the fortune of His Church as well, dependent upon their free coöperation. How often, for a fact, have a few devoted champions stood as a firm wall of defence for the house of God, or thrown themselves into the

[1] "Non sunt facienda mala ut eveniant bona," is a principle of conduct laid down by all sound moralists.

breach, turned the tide of battle and saved the day! How often, on the contrary, have large forces, strong in every natural means of defence but wanting in the spirit of devotedness, sacrificed the dearest interests of the Church to personal advantages and capitulated to the enemy! Without the spirit of devotedness, energy is a very unreliable factor. It may be prompt and resolute; but it will not be constant and enduring in the day of trial. Hence St. Ignatius, inviting us to cast our lot with Christ, is not content to stimulate our energy, but endeavors moreover to inspire us with great devotedness. What, he asks, would be the sentiments of a gallant knight, who has sworn to follow the fortunes of some earthly leader? What would he do to signalize himself by deeds of high emprise, for love of his native land? Surely, we should be no less devoted to our heavenly leader! Surely, religion should be as capable as patriotism of awakening chivalrous emotions in the soul![1]

Considerations like these naturally inspire us with generosity towards our Divine Lord; and generosity no less naturally leads to devotedness in his service. For generosity, as its name implies, is the characteristic of a well-born, high-souled man, who has a heart for noble deeds and, superior to the selfishness of little minds, is at all times ready to make sacrifices for the sake of others. It stands, therefore, both for mag-

[1] "Kingdom of Christ," Notes of Father Roothaan.

nanimity and for liberality.[1] Like magnanimity, it keeps "the mind bent upon some great act"; it "reaches out to some great things"; it "aims at what is worthy of high honors", though at the same time, it "does not make much account of human honors".[2] Like liberality, it "liberates a person from inordinate affection for what he has or owns" — his fortune, his time, his labor, his talents, his life itself — and disposes him to give it freely, offer it up, or devote it to some worthy object.[3] It is thus that St. Ignatius understands generosity, when he urges all to enter upon the Exercises of the Retreat with "magnanimity and liberality towards their Creator and Lord," offering themselves without reserve to his Divine Majesty, that He may make use of their persons and of all they possess, according to his own good pleasure.[4]

Generosity, like all the moral virtues, has its seat in the will. It consists in the habitual disposition to stifle all selfish inclinations which stand in the way of

[1] St. Thomas does not make mention of generosity in his treatise on the "Virtues." But the term generosity, as used by modern writers, ascetical as well as others, signifies at one time magnanimity, at another liberality, and perhaps most frequently the two together.

[2] St. Thom. Sum. Theol. II. II. q. 129. art. 1, 2.

[3] Id. ibid. II. II. q. 117, especially art. 2 and 3. According to St. Thomas, the object or matter of liberality is not money only, but "whatever can be measured by money," or is in any way procurable for money, such as a man's service etc.

[4] Annot. 5.

God's service, and to suffer, if need be, in order to give Him pleasure and promote his interests. But, since the will depends more or less upon the intellect and the heart, the virtue of generosity is also affected by them.

The light of the intellect guides the will. If that light is feeble, the will dares not venture beyond the limited circle, in which it has been accustomed to move. A narrow-minded man, therefore, is shut up within himself, liable to take onesided views, and inclined to bargain with God, before paying his dues. A broad-minded man, on the other hand, readily goes out of himself, looks at things from God's standpoint, and gives Him all that He asks.

The affections of the heart influence the will. If they are unruly, they hamper it and make it morally incapable of generous efforts. If they are well-disciplined, they spur it on and make it look upon the greatest sacrifices as the merest trifles. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance for all of us, to cultivate our emotional nature, with its passions and affections, in order that they may fully subserve the wise purpose of the Creator, by helping us to do our duty with ease and pleasure, with vigor and energy, with strength and efficiency.[1]

However, if in spite of ourselves we experience no sensible ease or attraction, but rather difficulty and reluctance in the discharge of our obligations, we

[1] See Lesson III, "The Passions etc."

need not be distressed thereat. For, in order to have generosity, it is not essential to feel it, but to will it. The greater the difficulty and reluctance, provided we vanquish them, the greater also will be the sacrifice; and sacrifice is the surest test of generosity.

To conclude, natural energy is useful in so far as it enables us to make sacrifices. Sacrifices are the measure of our virtue and consequently of our merit. For "he who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly; and he who soweth in blessings, shall also reap of blessings."[1] Sacrifices are the mark of our love and devotedness to the cause of Christ and of his Church. For "love shows itself in deeds,"[2] which require an offering of something that we prize. Sacrifices, in a word, are the fruit of that supernatural generosity, which finds its fullest expression in the well-known prayer of St. Ignatius:

"Take, O Lord, as Thine own, and accept as an offering from my hands, my whole liberty, my memory, my understanding and my will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given me all these things; to Thee do I restore them. They are all Thine; dispose of them according to thy will. Give me only thy love and thy grace. For with these I am rich enough, and I ask for nothing more."[3]

[1] II. Cor. IX. 6.

[2] "Probatio amoris exhibitio operis."

[3] "Spiritual Exercises—Contemplation on Divine Love." The above version of the Prayer takes into account the very judicious notes of Fr. Roothaan, and while not literal, expresses, it is hoped, the full sense and spirit of the original Spanish text.

LESSON XIX.

The New Life — It consists principally in Charity, perfecting the divine likeness in the soul.

All the exercises of Christian asceticism have for their ultimate aim and object to purify the heart by repressing the appetite, and gradually to make us such as God Himself wished us to be, when in the beginning He created man to his own "image and likeness."[1] In other words, they have for their ultimate aim and object, to restore and embellish, by means of constant self-discipline, the divine image and likeness, defaced and defiled by sin, and so to raise us to that higher state to which our Lord invites all his followers, when He says: "Be ye perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."[2]

"Perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect!" Have we ever endeavored to fathom the meaning of this short sentence? What is it, to be perfect? and perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect? The word "perfect" signifies thoroughly made, completed, finished in every detail. Thus a work of art it said to be perfect, when it has received the last touch of the master's hand, and fully answers the purpose for which it was designed.

[1] Genes. I. 26, 27.
[2] Matth. V 48

A famous artist, it is related, succeeded so well in painting flowers, that some bees, mistaking the picture for the reality, tried to extract honey from the colored canvas. Another produced a statue, which seemed so real and life-like that he himself addressed it, as if it had been a human being, and said to it: "Now speak to me." Both of these masterpieces were perfect, as works of art; because both were correct and finished likenesses of the original, which they were intended to represent. Just so creatures are said to be perfect, because they are correct and finished likenesses of the model which was present to the Creator's mind, when He called them into existence. That model was no other than his own divine essence, of which all created perfections are but imitations.[1]

All creatures, therefore, bear a greater or lesser likeness to their Creator, according as He communicates Himself to them more or less liberally, in their several grades of being.[2] Some have but a faint, natural likeness to Him; others, in addition to a closer natural likeness, have moreover a supernatural likeness, which He deigns to impress upon them, as a mark of gratuitous love.

By nature, creatures resemble their Creator in various ways. Some have only existence in common

[1] Hence theologians say, that God is the *model-cause* (causa exemplaris) of the world.

[2] St. Thomas, Sum. theol. I. q. 6. art. 1.

with Him, others have life, others again have intelligence. Yet all these may be perfect in their kind. Thus the crystal dew-drop, which trembles and sparkles in the morning sun, may be perfect; the rose, which unfolds its blushing leaves and scents the breeze, may be perfect; the lark, which soars aloft on nimble wing and fills the air with melody, may be perfect; because all those creatures may correspond fully to the ideal in their Creator's mind. But, however perfect in their kind, they have but a feeble resemblance to his infinite being.[1] They bear upon them, so to speak, the footprints of God and nothing more.[2]

Man alone in all this visible world was made "to the image of God,"[3] and therefore he bears a likeness to his Creator, not found in the lower creation. That likeness is in the soul which, resembling the Almighty in his spirituality, also participates in a finite way in the divine attributes of immortality, intelligence and free-will. It may be improved, to a certain extent, by dint of personal efforts, by study which develops the understanding, and by self-control which strengthens the will.

[1] St. Thomas, Sum. theol. I. q. 3, art. 2, and q. 4, art. 1.

[2] For this reason theologians say that in creatures, not endowed with reason, there is a representation or likeness of the Creator, as of footprints left upon them (per modum vestigii.)

[3] Genes. I. 27.

But, besides a natural likeness, there is also a supernatural likeness, imparted to our souls in Baptism, when we were born to a new and higher life, when we were elevated above the condition of the creature towards that of the Creator, when we were deified by a mysterious participation of the divine nature,[1] when, in a word, we were made children of God and brothers of Jesus Christ, who is the only absolutely perfect image of his Eternal Father.[2] "The Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit," writes St. Paul, "that we are the sons of God."[3]

This supernatural likeness of God will be completed in heaven, according to the teaching of St. John: "Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him; because we shall see Him as He is."[4] Then, as St. Paul assures us, "We all, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, [shall be] transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the Lord."[5] As a piece of iron plunged into fire, while retaining its own nature and essential qualities,

[1] II. Peter, I. 4. The Apostle says that we are made partakers of the divine nature; and the Fathers and Doctors of the Church constantly employ the words "deified" and "deification."

[2] Hebr. I. 3.

[3] Rom. VIII. 16.

[4] I. John, III. 2.

[5] II. Cor. III. 18.

partakes of the nature of fire, even so the soul in glory, while retaining her finite nature and distinct personality, will partake of the nature of God, by whom she will be wholly penetrated. She will be bright with his brightness, pure with his purity, perfect with his perfection.

"While we are in the body . . . . absent from the Lord,"[1] our supernatural likeness to Him consists essentially in that internal disposition or spiritual quality, which makes us worthy of "the future glory that shall be revealed in us."[2] That internal disposition or spiritual quality is sanctifying grace, operating through divine charity. Or, if you will, it is divine charity itself, conformably to the words of the Beloved Disciple: "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God."[3] For, according to some theologians, sanctifying grace and divine charity are really one and the same thing; charity is grace, considered as the active principle of the supernatural life. According to others, sanctifying grace is distinguished from divine charity, somewhat in the same manner as the soul is distinguished from its faculties; grace is, so to speak, the soul of the supernatural life, while charity, like every other supernatural virtue, is, as it were, one of its faculties or

[1] II. Cor. V. 6.
[2] Rom. VIII. 18.
[3] I. John III. 1.

powers, just as the intellect and will are faculties or powers of the natural human soul. Hence, when we are born to a supernatural life, we are, at the same time, endowed with the faculties necessary for the functions of that life; and therefore, in Baptism, charity and all the other supernatural virtues are infused into the soul, together with sanctifying grace.[1]

At all events, wherever there is sanctifying grace, there likewise is divine charity; and wherever there is divine charity, there likewise are all the other supernatural virtues. They all accompany charity, as courtiers accompany the queen; for charity is the queen of virtues.

In brief, the supernatural life consists principally in charity, and manifests itself in acts of charity. Hence St. John says, "he that loveth not, abideth in death;" and again, "he that abideth in charity,

[1] St. Thom. Sum. theol. I. II. q. 63. art. 3.

It is said, that charity, like every other supernatural virtue, is, "as it were," one of the faculties or powers, etc.; because the supernatural virtues are not, *strictly speaking*, faculties or powers — at least, not *full* and *complete* faculties or powers. For they presuppose the natural human faculties (intellect and will) which they elevate above their natural condition, and with which they form full and complete principles of supernatural activity. But it is strictly correct to say, that the supernatural virtues confer only the power and not the facility of performing supernatural acts of virtue. Cfr. St. Thom. Sum. theol. I. II. q. 110, art. 4; Suarez, de Grat. VI. 4—13; Bellarmin, de Grat. et Lib. Arb. I. 6.

abideth in God, and God in him."[1] And therefore it is by charity especially that the perfection of Christian life is measured.[2] Now, here below our love of God cannot be absolutely perfect. Not only are we incapable of loving Him to the full extent of his loveableness, but we are incapable of always concentrating the whole power of our affection upon Him. In the former sense, perfection is not possible to any creature; God alone can love Himself as much as He deserves to be loved. In the latter sense, perfection is not possible on the way to heaven; but it will be realized on our arrival in our heavenly home, when God shall be "all in all."[3]

There is a third kind of perfection that does not involve a continual actual yearning after God, but only an exclusion of whatever is inconsistent with the motion of love towards Him. And such perfection can be attained in this life, and that in two ways. First, perfection may go to the extent of excluding from the heart all that is contrary to charity, as is mortal sin. Without this degree of perfection charity cannot exist, and consequently it is of necessity to salvation. Secondly, perfection may go to the extent of excluding from the heart, not only all that is contrary to charity, but all that hinders us from giving our undivided affections to God. Charity can exist

[1] I. John III. 14 and IV. 16.
[2] St. Thomas, Sum. theol. II. II. q. 184. art. 1.
[3] Id. ibid. q. 46. art. 6.

without this degree of perfection, as it exists in beginners and proficients.[1]

However, the mere exclusion of mortal sin, and even of deliberate venial sin, scarcely deserves the name of perfection. It is rather the starting-point on the road which leads towards our ultimate perfection in heaven. On that road, as St. Paul exhorts us, we must all run the race of righteousness, that we "may gain Christ . . . . Not, as though [we] had already attained, or were already perfect . . . . But . . . . forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth to those that are before, [we must] press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ,"[2] and gradually eliminate whatever hinders us from attaining perfect union with God, through charity.

In this manner shall we put in practice the counsel of our Divine Lord, "Be ye perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." In this manner shall we advance in the grace and charity of God, and consequently in all the supernatural virtues. For, just as the supernatural virtues are infused into the soul at the same time with sanctifying grace,[3] so likewise are they increased by the same means and in the same

[1] Id. ibid. q. 184, art. 2. These degrees of perfection, as explained by St. Thomas, correspond very closely to the degrees of humility, as proposed by St. Ignatius. See Lesson X.

[2] Philip. III. 12—15.

[3] Concil. Trid. Sess. VI. 7.

measure. In other words, they are always in proportion to our merits.[1] And therefore, if we correspond faithfully to the graces received, we are rewarded with an increase of supernatural strength and made capable of more intense supernatural acts of virtue.

But the possession of a power or faculty does not always imply ease or facility, much less pleasure or complacency, in exercising it. Thus one may have a keen intellect and yet, owing to some infirmity or to some extrinsic impediment supervening, he may find it very hard to apply it. In like manner, a person may possess the supernatural virtues, even in a high degree, and nevertheless, in consequence of his natural disposition or the relics of previous acts, he may experience great difficulty in practising them.[2] A penitent, for instance, who has been reconciled to God by a sincere confession, after a life addicted to sins of drunkeness or of lust, has received, along with sanctifying grace, the supernatural habits of temperance and chastity. He has therefore the power of performing supernatural acts of those virtues and of meriting thereby the eternal rewards of heaven. Nevertheless, until, by repeated acts of resistance, he has vanquished the sinful craving which ordinarily remains in his lower nature, it will often require a

[1] Id. ibid. can. 32.

[2] St. Thom. Sum. theol. I. II. q. 65. art. 3.

great effort on his part not to return to his former ways, and fall from grace.

But there are also virtues which perfect human nature in its own order, and which are therefore called natural virtues. They are not themselves faculties or powers, nor do they confer new faculties or powers upon man. They simply adjust his natural powers in such a manner, that it is easy for him to exert them, conformably to the laws of morality.[1] They are best understood by contrast with the opposite vices; for every natural virtue is the direct opposite of a vice.[2]

Vice denotes weakness and imperfection; virtue denotes strength and perfection. Vice is a habit by which one does amiss; virtue is a habit which one never uses amiss. Vice is a flaw, owing to which something is not in a condition becoming its nature; it is, therefore, a disposition against nature. Virtue is an excellence, owing to which something is in a condition favorable to its nature; it is, therefore, a disposition according to nature.[3] Hence St. Thomas teaches that virtue is the perfection of a power.[4] It perfects the reason, by subordinating it to its Maker; it perfects the lower faculties, by conforming them to the laws of reason. Thus virtue in the sensitive faculties

[1] Id. ibid. q. 63, art. 2.
[2] Idem. q. 71. art. 4, § 2.
[3] Idem. I. II. q. 59. art. 1; q. 71. art. 1, 2.
[4] Id. ibid. q. 55. art. 1.

is nothing but the habitual conformity of those faculties to reason. In other words, it is the guiding principle of the movements of the sensitive appetite, or of the passions.[1]

In a certain sense, therefore, and to a certain extent, virtue as well as vice may be said to be inborn in all of us. For there are, by nature, in the reason of man some principles, theoretical as well as practical, which are, so to say, the seeds of the virtues, both intellectual and moral. And again there are, by nature in the will of man some cravings after the good which is according to reason. So that the seeds of all the virtues are found in every man, in as much as they belong to the nature of the whole species. But in other respects, as St. Thomas remarks, "some are better and some worse disposed to certain virtues. The explanation is, that the sensitive powers are energies of corresponding parts of the body; and, according to the disposition of those parts, the said powers are helped or hindered in their operations. Consequently the rational powers also, which these sensitive powers serve, are helped or hindered in like manner. Thus one man has a natural aptitude for knowledge; another for fortitude, a third for temperance. And in these ways the virtues, as well intellectual as moral, are in us by nature, to the extent of a certain rudimentary aptitude, but not in their perfect completeness.".[2]

[1] Id. ibid. q. 56. art. 4.

[2] St. Thom. Sum. theol. I. II. q. 63. art. 1.

Our first parents, it is true, were endowed from the beginning with the natural virtues, in fulness of measure.[1] Not only was their reason conformed to their Creator, but their lower faculties were subordinated to their reason. Not only had they a surpassing knowledge of natural objects,[2] but full control of their bodily inclinations. Not only were they exempt from positive error of the intellect, but from the rebellious instincts of the flesh. In this manner, their natural powers were perfected in their own order, and preserved from the defects, to which they were liable in consequence of their physical limitation.

But this condition was altogether exceptional, because the natural virtues, as they existed in our first parents before the fall, had not a natural but a preternatural origin. They were infused, together with sanctifying grace and the supernatural virtues, whereas, under ordinary circumstances, they must be acquired, like other habits, by the frequent repetition of the same acts. Thus, in fact, they were acquired by those pagan sages who, though deprived of the light of Christian faith, strove to conform their lives to the dictates of right reason, and who succeeded, by means of long continued personal efforts, in attaining so high a degree of natural virtue, that they appeared to be morally perfect men.

[1] Id. I. q. 95. art. 3.

[2] Gen. II. 19, 20; Ecclus. XVII. 1. 5. seqq.

It cannot be denied, however, that many of them had only the appearance of virtue, and that such as really cultivated some virtues, were often sadly deficient in others. One was patient, but addicted to every form of lust. Another was chaste, but unfair in his dealings with his fellow-men. A third was just, but devoured by pride and ambition. For it is to be remarked, that the natural virtues, unlike the supernatural, do not always necessarily include one another.[1] Much less do they include divine charity. And, therefore, a man may possess natural and acquired perfection, and yet, for all that, be very far from God; because it is charity, and only charity, that makes us truly acceptable in the divine sight, and disposes us properly, in order to our chief good and last end.[2] Hence St. Paul writes: "If I should distribute all my goods to the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burnt, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."[3]

A penitent, like St. Augustin, in the first fervor of his conversion, while the vices and evil habits of a life-time are still violently struggling within him for supremacy, is incomparably better in God's eye than

[1] Cfr. St. Augustin, Epist. 167.

Such virtues, though real, are not perfect; because there is no perfect virtue without prudence, which carries all the moral virtues with it.

[2] St. Thomas Sum. theol. I. II. q. 63. art. 2 and q. 65. art. 2; II. II. q. 23. art. 7.

[3] I. Cor. XIII. 3.

a man who has not charity, though his happy temperament, social environment and general propriety of conduct, in the past, have made it a second nature for him to "do the things that are of the law"[1] at least in the main and under ordinary circumstances. The former who possesses all the supernatural virtues, finds it difficult to practise them, because his previous acts have placed numerous obstacles in his way. The latter, on the contrary, who possesses only some natural virtues, experiences no difficulty in practising them, because his previous acts have removed the obstacles in his way. Yet the former, despite his sinful propensities, is a friend of God; and, if he but keep himself from mortal sin, he will infallibly be saved. The latter, with all his natural facilities, is an enemy of God; and, unless he be converted, he will never enter heaven.

Are we then to conclude, that "the children of light," wholly intent upon the supernatural virtues, may leave the natural virtues to "the children of this world?"[2] Are we to look upon the facility and readiness, which come from confirmed habits of correct living, as graces and accomplishments, that have little or nothing to do with the pursuit of Christian perfection? Quite the reverse. The supernatural virtues are God's gifts; they are "wrought in us" by Him

[1] Rom. II. 14.

[2] Luke XVI. 8.

and not by ourselves."[1] They require indeed, on our part, the disposition necessary to receive them; but they are in no sense caused or produced by ourselves. The natural virtues, on the other hand, or the readiness and facility which come from confirmed habits of correct living, are the effect of our actions, the fruit of our labors, the result of our efforts to conform our conduct to the laws of morality.

Now, these efforts we are bound to make, in order to preserve the supernatural virtues; because, if we fail to do so, we shall most certainly fall from grace, and thus forfeit divine charity, together with all the other supernatural virtues, which depend upon it for their existence.[2] It follows, therefore, that the same means that we must employ to preserve the supernatural virtues, will help us to acquire and strengthen the natural virtues, or the disposition which makes it easy for us to live virtuously.

When a person in the state of grace performs virtuous actions for the love of God, he derives therefrom a twofold advantage. In the first place, by reason of the supernatural motive which inspires his actions, he merits an increase of sanctifying grace,

[1] St. Thom. Sum. theol. I. II. q. 63. art. 2, and I. II. q. 55. art. 4.

[2] Faith (and the same is true of hope) can exist without charity, as a habit, indeed, but a habit that is not a virtue — *informis*, as theologians say.

Cfr. St. Thom. Sum. theol. II, II. q. 4. art. 5. and I. II. q. 65. art. 4.

and consequently, also, of all the supernatural virtues; and, in the second place, by the frequent repetition of the same actions, he gradually acquires a natural facility in the practice of virtue. For example, by constantly checking impetuosity or irritability of temper, from supernatural motives, he merits an increase of all the supernatural virtues; and, moreover, he acquires facility in the practice of the particular virtue of patience, just as he would have acquired a like facility, by the frequent repetition of the same actions, from purely natural motives.[1]

Thus, then, divine charity, which imparts a supernatural dignity and value to our actions and prompts us to do them all with the greatest care and perfection, furnishes us, at the same time, with the most efficacious means, as well as the strongest incentive, to acquire a natural facility in the practice of virtue. And, in this sense, it is true to say, that the pursuit of perfection consists largely in the cultivation of the

[1] The facility, acquired by the frequent repetition of supernatural acts of virtue, is attributed by some theologians to the *supernatural* habits of virtue, made more intense by the repetition of virtuous actions; but this opinion has little to recommend it. By others this facility is attributed to the *natural* habits of virtue, formed by the repetition of supernatural acts, just as similar habits would be formed by the repetition of natural acts of virtue; and this opinion is very probable. According to Suarez and others, this facility may be accounted for, without the formation of a habit; and such facility, though *consequent upon supernatural acts* of virtue, cannot *itself* be called supernatural. Cfr. Lugo de Fide, disp. 9, sect. 4. n. 79.

natural virtues, not so much for their own sake, as for the sake of the supernatural which they adorn and shelter, as the leaves of a tree adorn its branches and shelter its fruit.

This is the object, which we must propose to ourselves in the examination of conscience, in the subduing of corrupt nature, in the struggle against temptation, in the control of the predominant passion, and, in general, in all the exercises of the spiritual life — "stripping [ourselves] of the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new, him who is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of Him who created him."[1] This is the goal, upon which we must keep our eyes forever fixed, if we hope to restore the divine likeness, in our souls, to the state in which it was in Adam's soul, before his fall. So did the soldier Saint, Ignatius, of whom it is related, that he had acquired so complete a mastery over his passions, feelings and emotions, and even over his external senses, as not to move a finger, except at the bidding of reason. So did the Seraphic Saint, Francis, whom God recompensed for his victory over self, by giving him a power over the brute creation, not unlike that which man possessed in the days of primitive innocence.

At the same time, we must bear in mind, that the perfection to which we are all invited, does not depend

[1] Col. III. 9. 10.

upon actually reaching this goal during life, though it does depend upon straining every nerve to reach it, with the intention of removing all the obstacles in the way of perfect union with God through charity.

Even those favored Saints, who seemed to have no experience of the miseries to which flesh is heir, and "to rejoice as giants to run the way" of perfection, often felt faint and sick at heart, and bitterly bewailed their want of fidelity and of spiritual progress. Many other servants of God, solidly grounded in virtue and endowed with the rarest gifts of grace, were not exempt from minor failings — defects, it may be, of character or of education — which quite escaped their notice, or which long resisted their most heroic efforts at self-correction. And yet we are fain to imagine that, because we are transported with a vehement desire of perfection, we shall accomplish, at a bound, what they were unable to do in years of unremitting endeavor, and that, once our hearts are drawn towards heaven, they will never again feel the counter-attraction of earth. Fond but fatal delusion, which can lead to nothing but disappointment! True, one generous act may sometimes suffice to give a new direction to our natural inclinations; and God may suddenly transform us, as He transformed the Apostles on Pentecost-day. But "this is the change of the right hand of the Most High"[1] — a change so extra-

[1] Psalm LXVII. 11.

ordinary, that it were the height of presumption in us to hope for it.

Indeed, it is precisely when a man has given himself without reserve to God, that his defects are apt to become painfully sensible. Hitherto, in his intercourse with the world at large, he used to be forbearing, affable and condescending to the foibles of his fellowmen; and now he is become irritable, forbidding and self-concentrated. Is he, therefore, less perfect than he was before? Is he unamiable, because he is spiritual? Or has the natural in him been destroyed by the supernatural? Nay, rather, it has been made more conspicuous. So long as he was swayed by worldly motives, his defects were hid under the cloak of politeness, but not amended. His passions were under an artificial restraint in public; but they were all the more imperious in private. They obeyed or commanded, by turns, as it suited their purpose; but they were never fully subdued or amenable to reason. Now that he cares less for the opinion of others, he reveals himself such as he really is, and makes it clear to all, how little genuine virtue he formerly possessed.

Or perhaps, from a natural point of view, everything in the past was bright and cheerful and enjoyable. The current of his life ran smoothly, amid pleasant scenes and surroundings, There was scarce a ripple on the water, scarce a cloud in the sky,

scarce a sound in the air, to break the uniform quiet of his existence. His health was perfect, his fortune ample, his friends unnumbered. His virtue was never put to the test. At present, on the contrary, everything is dark and stormy and disturbed. His health is shattered, his fortune ruined, his friends dispersed. His virtue is being tried, as gold in the furnace. He is gradually casting off the dross of imperfections which had never before come to the surface. He is forming habits of real virtue, to replace the semblance of it; and some day he will be what, at one time, he only appeared to be.

Meanwhile others, who little know what heroic victories over self he is daily winning, do not appreciate his real worth nor show him the same esteem as of old. He himself, seeing the extent of his own frailty, heretofore unsuspected, feels greatly mortified, abashed, humbled; and thus he begins to lay the foundations of perfection in a profound sense of self-abasement. It is, therefore, not unfrequently a merciful providence, that Almighty God allows his servants to remain subject to some external defects, in order that, recognizing their natural weakness, they may be continually exercised in humility, and, though adorned with heaven's choicest gifts, "may know themselves to be but men."[1]

The spiritual combat in which we are engaged, is not an unbroken series of victories. Our adversaries

[1] Psalm IX. 21.

are as wily as they are strong. If they fail to overpower us, they will try to waylay us; if they are unable to destroy us, they will be content to wound us. We must, therefore, be prepared to meet with reverses. But we must not, on that account, give up the cause as lost, and surrender at discretion. On the contrary, we must redouble our efforts, and display our courage the more by speedily retrieving our losses and converting seeming defeats into evident triumphs.[1]

The course of our lives in this world, like the course of a vessel upon the ocean, is not along a uniformly straight line, nor is it ever wholly free from peril. Now driven before a sudden gale or overtaken by a fatal calm, now breasting the raging billows or drifting upon the swelling tide, we cannot hope to prevent our fickle craft from sometimes swerving right or left, from shipping sea or springing a leak. But, keeping our eyes on the compass and our hands on the helm, we may hope, with the divine aid, to make head against all opposing elements and reach at last the haven of salvation.

The science of the Saints, like other sciences, demands long and serious application. We must be ready, therefore, as all learners, to go on making trials and experiments, until, by a variety of exercises, graduated according to the stage of our spiritual progress, we have overcome the difficulties that we

[1] Louis de la Palma, "Part. Exam.," pages 23 et seqq.

experienced at the outset, and, through many blunders and failures, have at length acquired so much ease and skill in the practice of virtue, that it seems to have become a second nature to us.[1]

The perfect likeness of God in our souls is not the work of an instant. It is not produced like a statue of molten brass, which takes shapes as soon as it is cast in the mould, but rather like a statue of marble, which needs many a blow of the hammer and many a stroke of the chisel, before it represents even the barest outlines of the original. What is more, when we first begin our task, we are so unskilful that we are apt to misdirect our blows; the tools at our disposal are not always properly tempered, or they are quickly dulled by careless use; the material itself upon which we labor, has so many defects — a flaw here and a blemish there — that we are often at a loss, how to proceed. But let us not be discouraged. If we persevere unto the end, success will crown our efforts; and, if anything is still wanting to our work, when we present it to our Lord, on departing from this world, He Himself will give it the finishing touch of the Master's hand. Then, at last, the likeness will be complete; for, "when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is."[2]

[1] Cfr. Druzbicki, "The Tribunal of Conscience," pages 16 and seqq.

[2] I. John, III. 2.

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